Find the Errors - A Cash Contest

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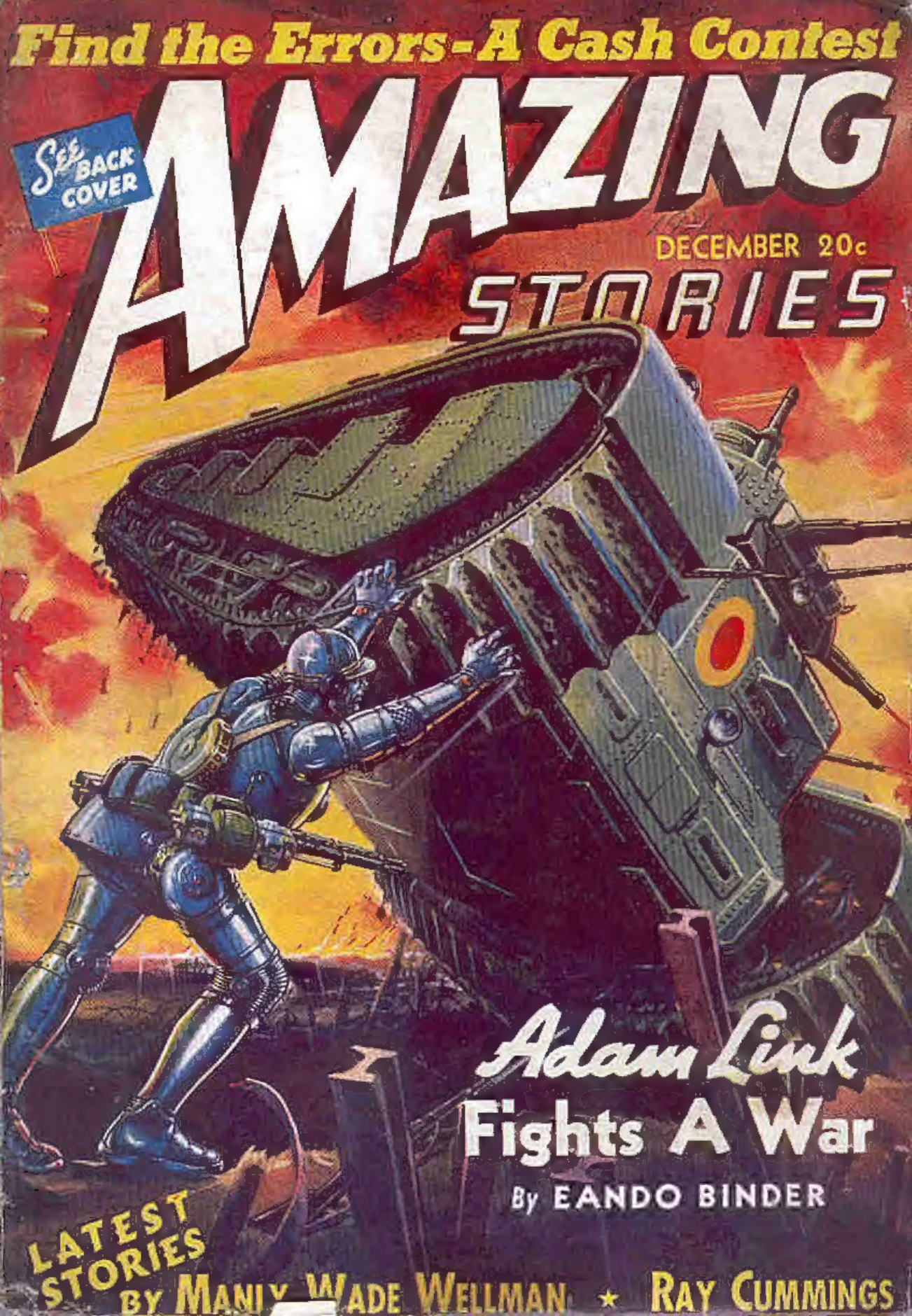
AMAZING STORIES

DECEMBER 20c



Adam Link Fights A War

By EANDO BINDER

LATEST STORIES BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN ★ RAY CUMMINGS

Find the Errors - A Cash Contest

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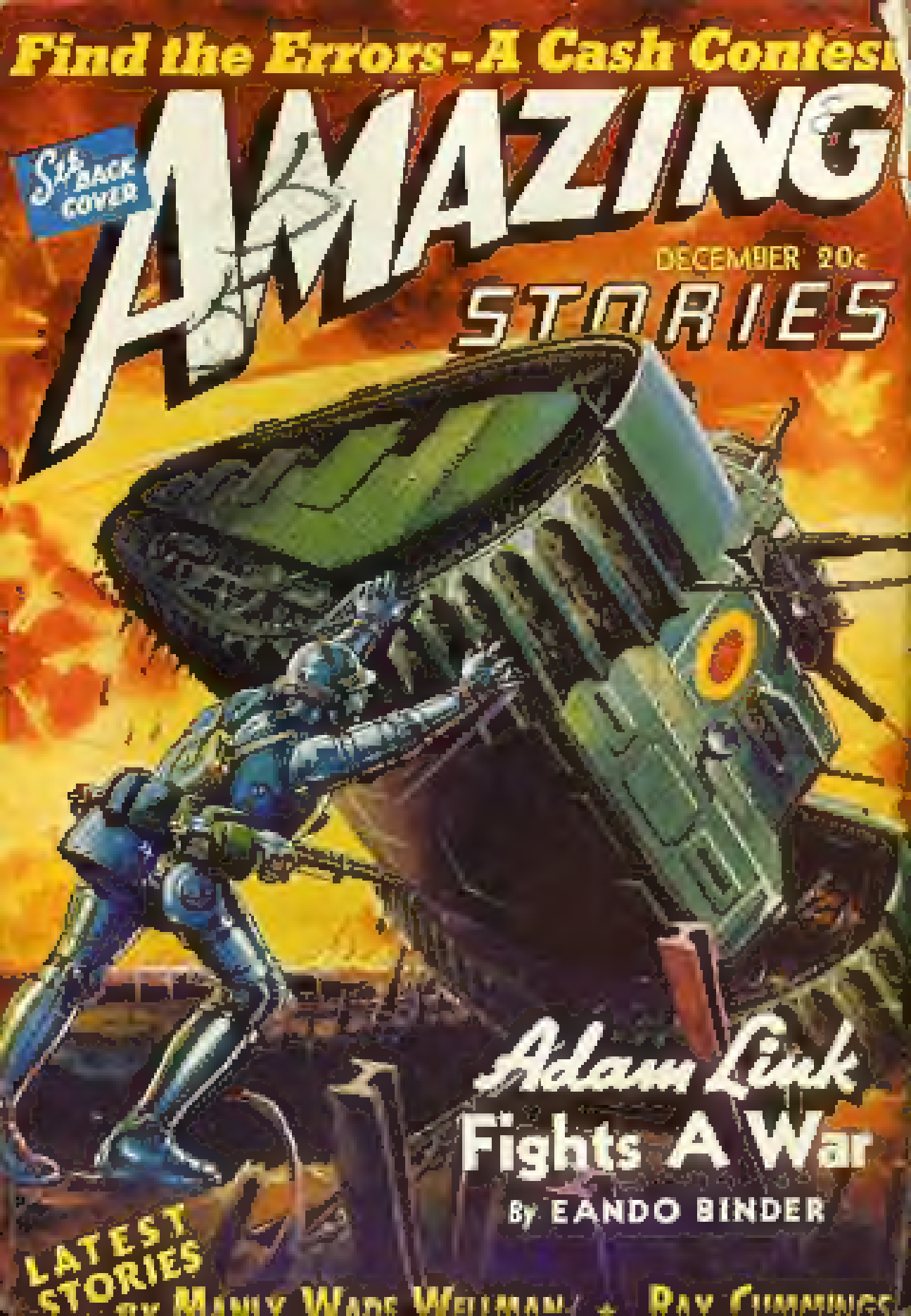

Adam Link Fights A War

By EANDO BINDER

LATEST STORIES BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN + RAY CUMMINGS

Let me help you give fine GIFTS
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SEND ME $1 – I'll send your choice of these Special Selections for 10 DAY TRIAL on my MONEY BACK Guarantee . . . . .

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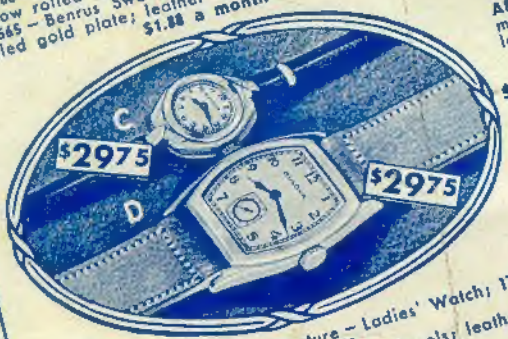

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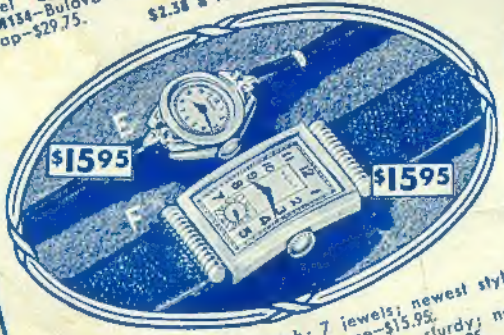

E-P159—Ladies' Kent Watch; 7 jewels; newest style 10K yellow rolled gold plate case—$15.95.
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(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

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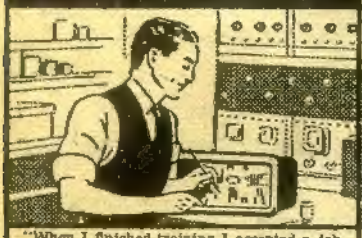
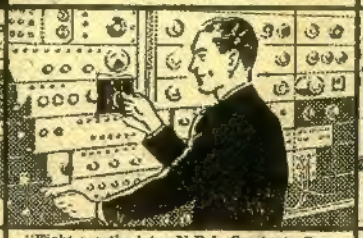
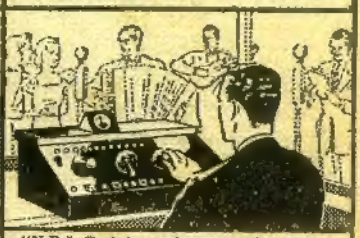
"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5 to $10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as Radio serviceman. In three weeks I was made service manager at $40 to $50 a week, more than twice my shoe factory pay."



"Eight months later N.R.I. Graduate Service Department sent me to Station KWCR where I became Radio Operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI and connected with Television Station W9XK."



"N.R.I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio has enjoyed a colorful past. It will enjoy an even greater future." —S. J. E. (Name and address on request.)

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Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen, in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

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City ..... State.....

DECEMBER
1940

AMAZING STORIES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOLUME 14
NUMBER 12

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Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua, depicting a scene from "Adam Link Fights A War"
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, depicting "A City On Mars"
Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, Julian S. Krupa, Leo Morey, Frank R. Paul, Joe Sewell, Dick Shaw, Guy Gifford, R. Newman

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AMAZING STORIES DECEMBER 1940

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Volume XIV
Number 12

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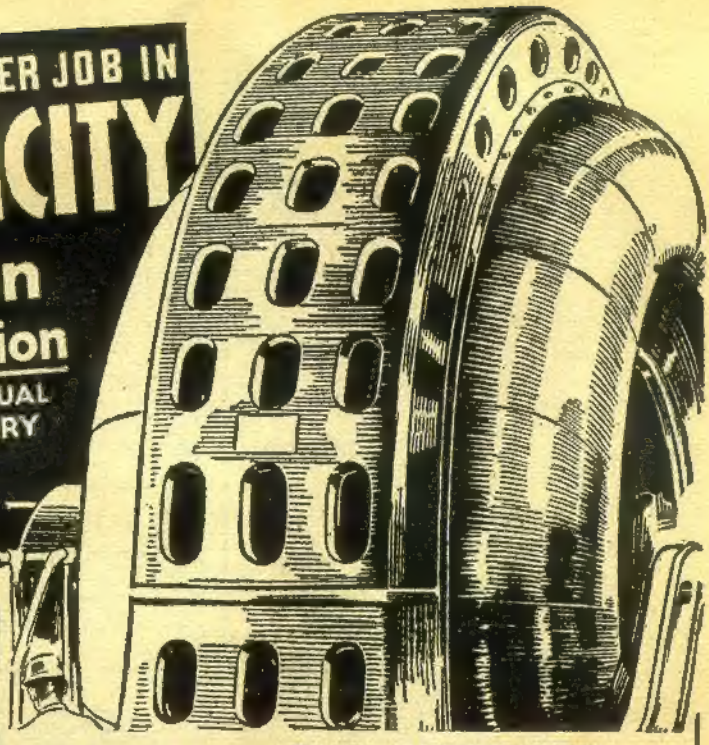

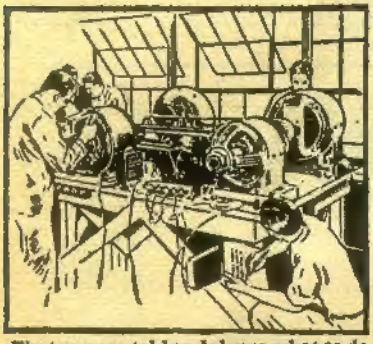

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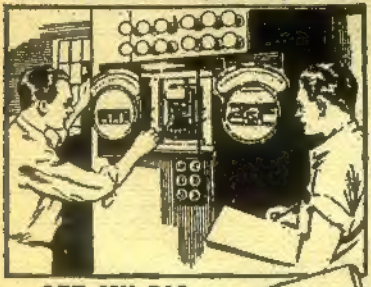

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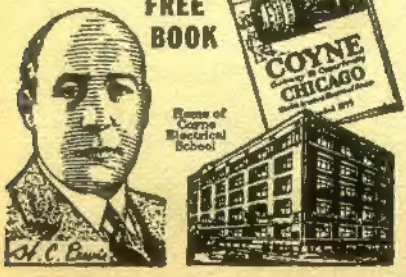

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30x4.50-21	2.40	1.10
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29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.75
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.35
5.25-17	2.90	1.25
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.25	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
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Size	Tires	Tubes
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9.00-20	10.95	5.45
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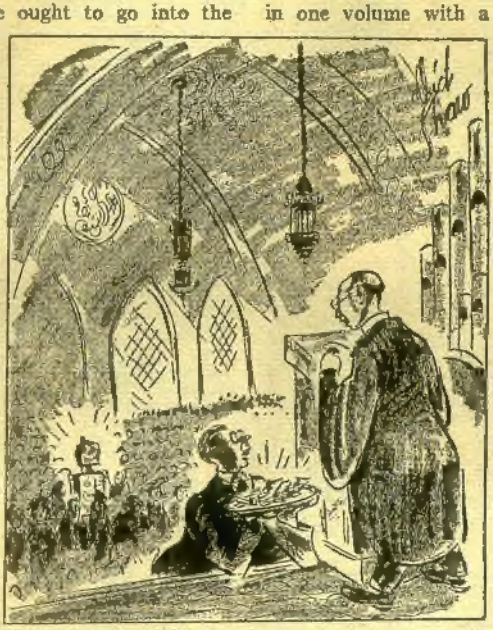
The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

BY this time, having seen the cover, you know that Adam Link is back again. We think this is news that will please you, but we have a surprise to announce. And it ought to please you even more.

Eando Binder drove up to Milwaukee with us some months ago, to a meeting of the Fictioneers, a group of writers who convene every two weeks, and on the way back, your editor suggested that Adam Link ought to become a time traveler. We further suggested that he ought to go into the past, say to the days of the Norse gods, Thor, and Freya, and Odin.

Unknown to us, Binder began reading ancient mythology, and suddenly discovered that Adam Link *really had been in the past!* He found his story and in a couple of months we are going to present it; the most amazing and convincing science fiction story ever written—*if it is fiction!* The story of Adam Link's search for Thor, the thunderbolt god, in ancient Asgard.



"Psst. Ninety dollars and twenty-one cents—and two body bolts and three washers from Adam Link."

DON'T miss the Error Contest in this issue. You've always liked to pick errors out of stories—now here's your chance to get paid for the pleasure of finding all the errors the author has included in his yarn. You'll find complete details on how to enter the contest on page 69, and the story itself is on page 70.

WITH this issue we begin a brand new series of back cover paintings by the old master, Frank R. Paul. But it's not *really* a new series—because all the characters of his "Life On Other Worlds" will appear again. But this time as citizens of "Cities Of Other Worlds." This month we present Paul's vivid conception of "A City On Mars." Next month we will give you "A City On Venus." We suggest that you keep your copies, because we predict this will be the most popular science fiction art collection ever presented.

YOUR newsstand is now presenting a big collection of seventeen complete science fiction stories from AMAZING STORIES of the past, bound in one volume with a new cover by Julian S. Krupa. It includes stories of the March, April, and June issues, and carries in complete form the popular novel, *Black World*, by A. R. Steber. You might want to add AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY to your collection, so get it now, because the edition is limited.

WE promised last month to tell you all about the 1940 World Science Fiction Convention, which was held here in Chicago on September 1 and 2, at the Hotel Chicagoan.

Well, here's the story, and what a story it is!

YOUR editor arrived as the doors opened at 10:30 A. M. and was greeted by Convention Officials Mark Reinsberg and Erle Korshak and Bob Tucker. After that, we met so many fans and readers of AMAZING STORIES that we can't begin to remember their names. But we certainly do remember such names as E. E. Smith, Ph.D., author of the famous Skylark stories; Jerry Siegel, creator of Superman; Forrest J. Ackerman, acknowledged science fiction fan number one; Ross Rocklynne and Charles R. Tanner, popular writers (and incidentally, we bought a yarn from Tanner at the

convention, which means he's coming back to science fiction after a lapse of several years). In short, everybody was there and everybody had a wonderful time.

DURING the afternoon a science fiction movie of a Martian invasion, prepared by Bob Tucker, was shown. Roars of laughter greeted clever interpolations of wild west scenes and bits of burlesque which caused the Martians no end of wonderment.

THIS was followed by a speech by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., speeches by Ralph Milne Farley, and Mortimer Q. Weisinger, prominent New York editor, and a few words by your own editor, which, fortunately, were received with enthusiasm amounting almost to complete boredom.

THE feature of the convention was the masque party of the evening, wherein a great many fans appeared dressed in costumes of the future, of other worlds (E. E. Smith came as Northwest Smith, and sported a ray gun that actually worked!), as Superman, Buck Rogers and many others.

MORE than forty original paintings from AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES were auctioned off, with great success, and every fan received at least one original illustration entirely free.

THE feature of the second day of the convention was the honor banquet for Doc Smith.

A REPORTER from *Time* attended the convention and was besieged by indignant fans who remembered what that magazine said about them at the New York convention last year. Your editor has no doubt but what he got the truth poured into him this year, and we expect to see the result in a few days, when the report gets out.

ALL in all, if you weren't there, you missed the time of your life, if you can imagine Superman, Buck Rogers, and Adam Link prancing around the Chicago Loop, firing ray guns and disintegrators at all the cops, and launching off the roofs of tall buildings with rocket ships and time travelers!

Now, aren't you sorry you didn't come? But don't fret too much. Next year, the committee says, it will all be bigger and better in Denver!

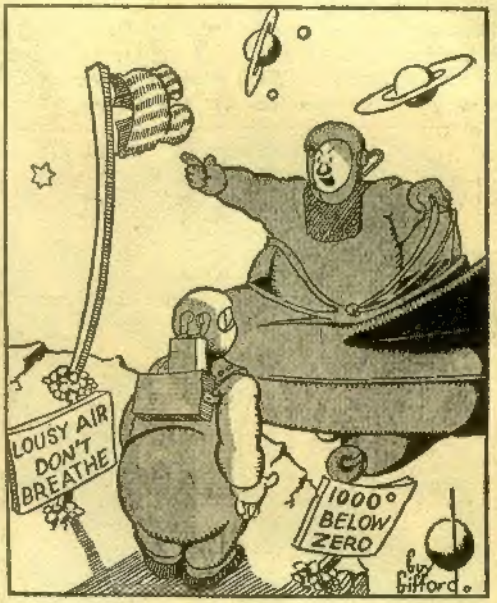
HERE'S a bit of news with an odd twist to it. Up in Milwaukee there's a bowling team which kegels under the banners of your favorite magazine, AMAZING STORIES. Which is news in itself, but the odd part is that the team, which numbers six members, is composed of three authors, each with his brother as a companion.

Henry Gade bowls with his brother, Leo Gade; Edwin Benson pairs up with his brother Gus; and A. R. Steber completes the dual trio by bowling alongside his brother Bill Steber.

Incidentally, they opened the season on September 10th by winning two games. Keep it up, boys!

OF course you've noticed the return of the old master, Ray Cummings, in this issue? Here's one of his popular stories of the kind that made him famous — and it's only the first of several we've just bought from him. Says Ray Cummings: "I've gotten a huge kick out of doing these yarns for you in my old style, the style I like best. You've given me more enthusiasm with this suggestion than I've had in many a day for my work!"

So, dear readers, we think you will enjoy "Priestess Of The Moon."



"All I wanta know is, how'd ya get the shorts off?"

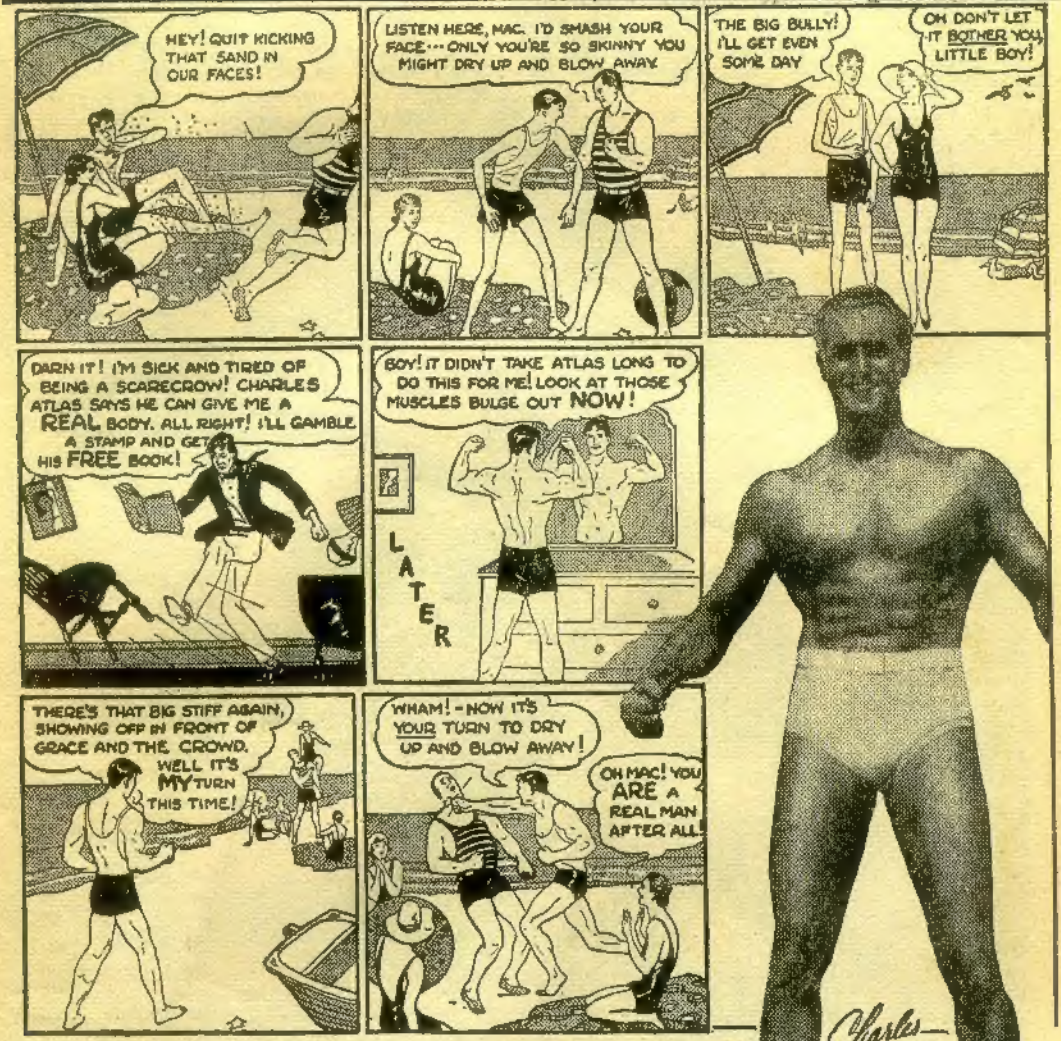
ABOUT next month's cover. It will be done by J. Allen St. John, and will illustrate Edgar Rice Burroughs' "John Carter and the Giant of Mars." Here again we bring together two of the oldest names in the field to renew old glories in AMAZING STORIES. They'll both be with us many more times.

DUE to a rather amazing flood of requests, this issue contains four cartoons. Your editor is indeed amazed to discover how popular these little jokes have become, and accordingly we are spotting them more generously about the book.

YOUR editor has been watching the news of U-235 as it comes from the many scientists working on it who are *permitted* to make reports, and he has begun to reconcile himself to the fact that it is useless to worry about the war, the future, and himself, because at the rate things are

(Concluded on page 66)

THE INSULT THAT MADE A MAN OUT OF "MAC"


HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!
LISTEN HERE, MAC. I'D SMASH YOUR FACE··· ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.
THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY
OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU, LITTLE BOY!
DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!
BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! LOOK AT THOSE MUSCLES BULGE OUT NOW!
LATER
THERE'S THAT BIG STIFF AGAIN, SHOWING OFF IN FRONT OF GRACE AND THE CROWD. WELL IT'S MY TURN THIS TIME!
WHAM! - NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY!
OH MAC! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL!

. . . as he looks today, an actual, untouched photograph.

Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a NEW MAN!

I'll show you how to get the kind of body you have ALWAYS wanted! A big-muscled, evenly-developed physique. A broad, powerful chest. Biceps with SMASH in them. Arms and legs with energy, endurance and SPEED. A powerful back. A stomach ridged with bands of muscle. A REAL MAN'S build that stands out in a crowd!

My body-building method, "Dynamic Tension," changed me from a 97-pound weakling into twice-winner of the title "World's Most Perfectly-Developed Man." Let me prove it can work wonders with your body, too!

7-DAY TRIAL OFFER

TRY "Dynamic Tension" for 7 days. If, even in that short time, it doesn't begin to show you results you can see, feel, measure with a tape—you don't have to go ahead with it, and the trial won't cost you anything.

"Dynamic Tension" has done so much for me and other fellows that I simply ask you to give it a trial. Make me prove it can make a new man of YOU—start new inches of power pushing out your chest, build up your shoulders to champion huskiness, put new, hard muscles on your biceps!

FREE 48-PAGE BOOK

Gamble a stamp, or a penny postcard. Send for my FREE BOOK today. It shows actual photos of skinny, scrawny fellows that I've helped change into husky, brawny MEN. Just put your name and address on the coupon, or on a postcard, and send it to me TODAY. Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 910, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 910

115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-Day Trial Offer.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

My robots thundered after me as I charged into battle.

FIGHTS A WAR

By EANDO BINDER

I AM a robot. A metal man with a brain of sponge iridium. I have gears and wheels and I run on a battery. True enough. But I have the mind of a man! I have all the qualities that you humans have. I have intelligence that works logically. There is no chance factor in my makeup.

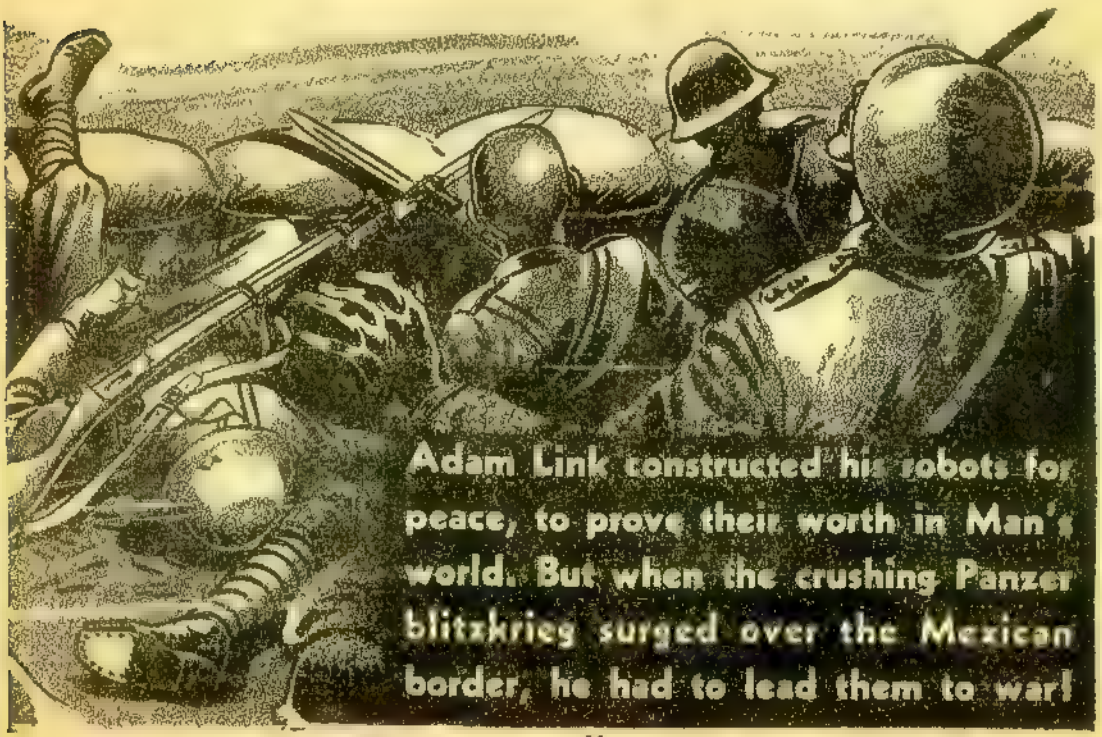
That is why I want to be—must be!—accepted by society as an equal.

"I wish to file a patent," I said.

"On what?" the Patent Bureau official asked.

He looked at me as all you humans do at first glance—with astonished wonder. You do not believe I can be an intelligent robot. You shift your eyes behind me, to see wires leading to some human control.

Then, suddenly, you remember all the facts about me. That I have had a court trial, and conducted a business,



Adam Link constructed his robots for peace, to prove their worth in Man's world. But when the crushing Panzer blitzkrieg surged over the Mexican border, he had to lead them to war!

and broken up a crime ring, and amazed the world by my doings in the athletic field. That I am a free, independent mind housed in metal instead of flesh.

Your eyes open wide. You are astounded, and a little afraid. But then, remembering I am harmless, you smile as though you are used to seeing robots; and nothing in the world can disturb you. For you don't want to seem like a silly old woman.

"A patent on myself," I answered.

"On *yourself!*" gasped the official, Wilson by name. He stared as though he had just heard a new kind of auto or airplane ask for a patent on itself.

Three others were with me. Jack Hall and Tom Link, my human friends. And Eve, my robot mate. We had been in Washington a week, since Jack's publicity campaign in the sports world had ended.

I had carefully drawn up a set of blueprints of my iridium-sponge brain. That was the only patentable item. The rest of my body was simply long-used mechanical gadgets and principles.

"I want the patent in my own name —Adam Link," I added.

"It's out of the question!" Wilson stammered.

"I could see his thoughts whirling at the unprecedented request — an invention asking for a patent on itself. His eyes lit up as he thought a way out of his puzzling dilemma.

"A patent can only be granted to a citizen. Are you a legal citizen of the United States?"

He knew I wasn't. He had read in the papers of my refusing citizenship, a week ago.

"I refused citizenship because I feared that robots might some day outvote humans," I returned in explanation. "I don't want robots ever to be a menace to human society. But neither do I want robots to become utter slaves to mankind. Therefore, I wish the patent in my name. I will manufacture robots as I see fit, and guide their efforts."

"But you'll have to have someone else—any friend of yours, for instance —take out the patent in his name. . . ."

"No," I broke in. My mechanical voice was rather sharp. "I would trust no man on Earth with the patent rights."

How can I explain? How can I make it clear that no human mind can quite grasp the problem of introducing robots into civilization? And that my future fellow-robots would resent absolute human control? You humans like to be ruled by someone from your own race, or nationality, or group. The coming robot race must have a robot leader—myself.

Jack and Tom behind me were not offended. They understood, too, that much as they meant to me, I could not give them control over robots.

"I'm sorry," Wilson shrugged. "The patent cannot be issued in the name of Adam Link unless that name is on the official roster of citizens. There is nothing more I can do about it."

I GAVE Eve a helpless glance. We left wordlessly. Once more we had been rebuffed by humans.

"Maybe we can still do something," Tom Link tried to say consolingly outside. "I'll approach business men, tell them you'll grant manufacturing rights and let them have profits. They have a powerful lobby in the Patent Bureau."

My head shook on its swivel.

"I do not want robots turned out on assembly lines like so many radios."

My metal feet-plates clattered loudly as I strode down the sidewalk of the avenue. People looked at Eve and me curiously. Were we to remain just curiosities? Never to gain a secure, ac-

cepted place in human affairs?

We passed a newsstand. The headlines, as usual, related to the warclouds hanging over Earth.

"It's a wonder," mused Jack, "that they haven't thought of you in the fighting forces. Metal men, tireless, efficient, adamant to bullets! You—"

"Never!" I snapped, so loudly that Jack jumped. "I'm sorry, Jack, but don't mention that again!"

I turned. "Eve," I said, "we would be another of the follies of mankind, if our race were introduced unwisely—especially into warfare!"

"We have time to wait, dear," she responded. "Centuries, if need be."

BUT CENTURIES did not seem necessary. The next morning a huge, shining limousine pulled up before the hotel in which we had a suite. We do not need human food or sleep, Eve and I, but in all else we follow the accepted customs.

"Mr. Wilson wishes to see you, Adam and Eve Link," said the driver. "Your patent will be granted."

Astonished and pleased, we went. Jack and Tom stayed behind, not having been invited, but wished us luck. We were ushered into an inner chamber at the Patent Bureau. Wilson was there with four distinguished men, one in uniform. They arose and bowed, the army man saluting.

I could not understand all this sudden deference, when only yesterday we had been treated so brusquely.

Wilson cleared his throat, as if to make a speech.

"If you'll pardon yesterday's rudeness, Adam Link, we'll get down to business. It so happens that a Senate committee of three, who have been interested in your career, have intervened in your behalf. We are to grant you a patent, without being a citizen.

"I am sure all the people of this country will consider it a just reward for your noble exploits. You have been in the nation's eye for a year. You are —to put it simply—a national figure!"

My metal chest does not expand under praise. But I think my body straightened a little. I felt proud and happy. At last humans were treating me as an equal.

"We have the papers all made out," Wilson went on smoothly, moving them across the desk. "Please sign here, Adam Link."

I grased the pen. Eve touched my arm. Her low whisper came to me. alone.

"The man in uniform is leaning forward, Adam. Are you sure everything is all right?"

MAN in uniform!

Cold water seemed to splash over my mind. I read the patent paper, flipping the pages over and reading them all in a few seconds with my television eyes. One passage stood out:

"The government reserves the right to use any and all inventions it deems of military value, *with full authority*."

I looked at Eve. Through our minds flashed Jack's words— "It's a wonder they haven't thought of you in the fighting forces."

They had! I had been on the verge of signing myself into military slavery. I set the pen down quietly, sadly at being deceived.

"Gentlemen," I said bitterly, "I cannot sign. I cannot allow robots to be used in warfare!"

They all flushed, giving themselves away, and I went on.

"I consider this my country, as much as you do. I would never be disloyal to it, in any way. But as a robot I have a greater duty to all mankind; never to allow robots to become a menace.

"Please see my side of it! Robots must only be servants of peace—as workers, builders, engineers, scientists. They must never take human life. Or else one day there would come the terrible struggle of all robots against all mankind!"

I went on in this vein for some minutes. The men fidgeted. They had lost interest. The military men arose and left, flatly. I was just a soap-box orator now, talking of things that were annoyingly thought-provoking. You humans, in general, are quite allergic to serious thinking.

Wilson stopped me. "You would be useful as a military item. Right now, that's our main concern, during present world conditions. We're hardly concerned with robots in any other capacity."

"Let me show our worth," I begged. "As workers, laborers—anything!"

Wilson shook his head, but one of the senators spoke up, casually.

"There's a government project being started in Southern California. Reworking of an old abandoned silver mine. It may be dangerous to human life. Would you want to try that, Adam Link?"

I detected the subtle sarcasm in his voice. I had refused to be inveigled into military service. Would I take, instead, that lowly, common opportunity? He had as good as told me they thought robots *might* be useful in war, but utterly worthless in any other field of human endeavor.

I was being pacified, shunted aside, insulted. They were ribboning me with red tape. One other of your human terms is most apt—I was being kicked around.

I could see their viewpoint, however. The world situation at present was so vital and grave that the advent of the intelligent robot was a trivial issue.

"Yes," I said to their surprise, "I will show you how robots can be of benefit without fighting wars!"

CHAPTER II

First-Class Heel

TWO months later I was repeating those words, to a group of thirty robots. They stood in a straight row before me, their alloy bodies shining in the bright sun of Southern California. Their mechanical parts had been turned out by eastern factories, according to my specifications.

During those two months, Eve and I had worked twenty-four hours a day, in my private workshop-laboratory in the Ozark Mountains. Near the spot where I had been created, two years before, I developed thirty new iridium-sponge brains. No factory on Earth could devise them. I alone knew that ultimate secret of metal life.

The whole—bodies and metal brains—had been shipped by freight to California, and here assembled by Eve and myself. Battery current had crackled into the thirty brains and endowed them with life. We had just finished a week before. Thus before us stood thirty creatures like ourselves.

Not quite like ourselves. Eve and I had lived and moved among humans for many months. We had come to know human thoughts and reactions. We had adjusted ourselves to the human viewpoint.

These thirty brother robots had only known existence for a week. They were neuters, having no distinctive male or female viewpoint. After teaching them to walk and talk and read—in a short day—we had given them only technical and scientific books to read. I had no time to further their education in human relationships. Gradually they would pick that up.

"Fellow robots," I said, "you are the first of the robot race! I created you for one sole purpose—to serve the human race. Yet not as slaves. If we prove ourselves worthy, we will be given a respected place in human society. Robots and humans together, planning intelligently, can build a truly great world!"

I wanted to add, "one without war," but didn't. These robots of mine, I was determined, must not hear of that blind, stupid human way of settling differences. I did not want these thirty new minds to be instantly disillusioned in their human masters.

I went on, glad that the bitterness of my thoughts could not be reflected in my flat phonic tones.

"This project we are members of is a lowly, insignificant task. It is simply the mining of an ore, silver, that does little real good except in the minds of men. Certain human leaders have seen fit to put obstacles in our way, proving our mental worth.

"We should be builders, engineers, fashioners of high skill. We are instead starting as miners. Moles digging in the ground. Worms scratching in the soil and bringing up bits of dull metal—"

Eve touched my arm. Her eyes told me to watch my words. The thirty robots were puzzled. I could see their new-born minds laboring to understand what I meant. Yet how could they understand this roundabout way of getting a point across? They knew only that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points—in all things. I was confusing them. I nodded to Eve and switched.

"However, this is still a golden opportunity. We'll dig and mine silver at an unprecedented rate. Humans will sit up and take notice. They will begin to see the true value of robots. Slowly but surely we will win our place in the sun. Work, my brothers! The future of the robot race lies in your hands!"

I STARED proudly now at the thirty stiff, unmoving metal men. The hum of their internal mechanism filled the air and spoke of power, strength, skill. We would show the human race! We would make a name for ourselves. . . .

"Through with your little pep-talk?"

I turned to the speaker. I didn't like this Lem Daggert's cynical, almost sneering tones. But the government had appointed him superintendent of the project, and there was nothing I could do about it. Nor did I like his cold blue eyes, nor the fleshy lips that curled constantly around an unlit cigar. I analyze humans quickly. Daggert was overbearing, rude, avaricious.

"Now let's get down to business," he grunted. "You and your robots will do all the shaft work. Dangerous in there. Don't want any lives lost. Doesn't matter if a robot or two gets buried in a collapsing tunnel."

"These robots are living!" I snapped back. "A robot lost is a *life* lost—"

"All right, all right," he interrupted petulantly. "But I'm the boss here. What I say goes. Is that understood, Mr. Adam Link?"

Our eyes locked. I didn't like this attitude. But I could do nothing about it. My official orders were to obey him.

I nodded wordlessly.

He grinned. It tickled him, I could see, to have a hard, powerful metal being knuckling down to him. I had the strength of ten men in one arm. Yet he could order me about like a lackey. Jungle law, with the might of authority replacing the might of claws and muscles. Have you humans ever analyzed your so-called "civilization?"

Daggert waved a hand to the lounging group of dark-skinned men outside

their bunkhouse nearby. Smoking cigarettes, dirty, unkempt, they contrasted harshly with my shiny, upright robot platoon.

"These men I've hired will do the work above ground," Daggert resumed. "Grading ore, sorting, washing and trucking it to San Simone railroad junction, north of here. Mostly Mexes, some Japs. Don't look like much, but good workers—"

"And cheap!" I suggested in a low whisper. He flushed in anger, but I went on evenly. "Don't try to deceive me, Daggert. The lower your operating costs, the more you get out of the appropriation money.

"Well, that's your business. But I warn you, your men are going to have to go some to keep up with my robots. Ore will come out of that shaft like an avalanche."

"Huh!" Daggert grunted skeptically. "Just a bunch of machines. And machines break down."

"But they can be repaired quickly," I said casually. "Your men have to sleep and rest. They get sick and lazy at times. My robots will work twenty-four hours a day without tiring!"

Cheap, boastful statements. But the had the desired effects. Daggert's lips clamped around his cigar viciously.

"You hear that, men?" he roared. "So you're trying to show us humans up, Adam Link? Think we haven't any guts, eh ? Okay, I accept the challenge. Get your tin monkeys shoveling out ore—fast! We'll handle any amount!"

AT least in that, if unwittingly, Daggert was coöperating. I wanted the production curve of Dried Valley Mine to rise at a steep angle. I wanted Washington to know that robots were on the job.

I stuck out my hand, to shake on the agreement. Daggert laughed in my face, ignoring my gracious gesture.

"You—" I began, but broke off, turning my eyes up.

A plane drummed in the sky, soaring over us. I was surprised. No mail or commercial air routes passed over this odd corner of undeveloped territory between the deserts and the Pacific Ocean.

Daggert watched it, then shrugged.

"Mex plane," he hazarded. "We're only fifty miles north of the border."

But I wondered. It had the trim, sleek lines of an ultra-modern fighter plane. A U.S. army plane, out on scout duty?

I dismissed the matter. There was ore to dig.

"Let's go!" I sang out to my robots. Their line broke and they stalked after me into the shaft penetrating the side of a cliff. The sunlight faded on our metallic forms.

CHAPTER III

Arrival of Mary

WE explored first, and found the old abandoned mine in a state of ruin. The main shaft branched into a half-dozen others. The ends of these splayed out in little separate tunnels, following the haphazard veins of silver.

Once the ore had been rich. But now only low-grade silver-bearing shale remained. The mine could show a profit only if the ore were shoveled out in huge quantities.

The main shaft's system of bracing beams was in good condition, but further on portions of tunnel had caved in. Debris littered all the corridors. Several of the remote branches were completely blocked off where a section of roof had caved in for yards.

Reaching the last branch tunnel, I halted my robots. We listened. All else

had been silent as a tomb. But from this shaft came a low, rubbing sound. I stooped and went in. Ten feet beyond I straightened in a larger hollow.

The beam of my miner's lamp, fastened to my head-piece, centered on a man. He kneeled in the dirt, a pan in his hand. In the light of a flickering candle he had been panning silver ore, picking out the silver specks and stuffing them in a soiled handkerchief.

He was frozen in that kneeling attitude. His eyes, pop-eyed with terror, danced over my bright metal form.

"Ghosts!" he moaned finally. "They told me there were ghosts down here!"

"I'm no ghost," I said, smiling within myself. "I'm Adam Link, the robot. What are you doing here?"

"Adam Link? Robot?" Obviously he had never heard of me. He looked the part of one of those wandering prospectors who shunned civilization — a dried-up little old man with a pathetic humbleness about him.

"Who's inside that iron suit?" he quavered. "Please don't hurt me. I only been sneaking in here once in a while to pan me a couple ounces silver. Doing nobody no harm. Please, sir, let me go!"

He cringed as though expecting me to strike him.

"I won't harm you," I assured him. I wished at that moment my metallic tones could show the kindliness I felt. "What's your name?"

"Dusty." At the same time that he gave the single odd name, he scratched his side. His clothes, at the touch, gave off a cloud of dust. The name was self-explanatory.

"Well, Dusty," I proposed, wondering what to do about him, "suppose you come outside with me. We'll see what we can do for you."

I took him straight out to Daggert. I wanted to report on the mine's condition anyway. Daggert listened to the story, then glowered at the little prospector.

"You little rat!" he growled. "Stealing silver, eh? I'll teach you—"

His fist shot out at Dusty. But the blow never landed. I have reflexes twice as fast as any human. I caught his wrist. Daggert fell against me, knocking his breath out.

WHEN he regained it, he almost screamed.

"Damn you, Link, don't interfere! I'm running this show. Let me at him—"

I grasped the enraged man by the shoulders and held him. He weighed 250, with masses of muscle standing out like cords. But he couldn't move. When he had worn himself out struggling and kicking at me, I released him. He stumbled back, cursing violently.

"Dusty," I said calmly, "you can continue taking silver out. As much as you want."

"Oh, boy!" he cried delightedly. "When I get enough, I'll go and have a bang-up good time at San Simone. Thanks, Mister!"

I don't know why I did it. Sometimes my own impulses surprise me. I only knew at that moment that it made me strangely happy to see the little man dance with joy.

"Good idea, wearing an iron suit," he commended me, feeling a little cocky in my protection. "Keeps some grizzlies at their distance."

Deliberately, he patted his clothes. A cloud of dust emerged and drifted into Daggert's nostrils.

"Keep out of my way, worm," Daggert warned, coughing. He eyed me. "As for you, Mr. Clank, get that ore out. Never mind digging up any more forgotten souls. I'll let it go this time."

He stamped away.

"That was a nice thing to do, Adam!" Eve's whisper had sounded in my ear. She understood.

Dusty was looking at us both more closely now.

"Say, pard," he murmured, "are you or aren't you a man in an iron suit?"

I explained, as best I could, that I was a robot.

Dusty's desert-squinted eyes widened steadily. Shock settled over his face. Slowly he pulled a bottle from his pocket and took a long drink of some amber liquid. Whiskey I believed it is called. The shock faded.

"Okay!" he chirped suddenly. "You're a tin man. But you really got a softer heart, I reckon, than many a hombre I knows. Shake, pal!"

He skipped to the shaft, then, to pan his little bits of future "good time."

"Eve," I said, "I wish all humans would accept us as readily and completely as that simple soul!"

NO ORE came from the shaft for three days. It took us that long to clear out the debris, repair the rails and push-cars of the deteriorated railway system, and explore for the best deposits.

Daggert taunted me. "Where's all this ore you bragged about? Come on, Mr. Clank. You talk big and do small."

He changed his tune within a week. Carloads of ore began to rumble from the shaft, pushed by my robots at breakneck speed. Deep in the tunnels, picks and shovels filled the enclosed air with a deafening din, wielded by muscles of steel.

"Well, Daggert?" I said, watching his men toiling and sweating on three shifts, handling the deluge of ore.

"You ain't got us licked!" he snarled. I think he even went to the extent of promising the men more pay!

BUT I didn't attempt to crowd his men beyond their capacity. I was satisfied that production was high. My robot squad settled down to a top-speed routine. But I had my troubles too. Now and then, one of my men broke a muscle-cable or swivel-cam. He would be carried out and turned over to Eve, above ground. With a stock of replacement parts, she quickly made repairs.

The second week, half of my force developed symptoms of creaky joints. It turned out that the grease we used was too light for that semi-tropical climate. The next truck back from San Simone with supplies brought a drum of heavy axle grease. Our gears and cogs worked smoothly once again.

THEN THERE was Eve.

I gradually noticed that she was becoming strangely taciturn. Pensive and even "blue" moods came over her. One day I emerged from the shaft with Robot Number 18, half carrying him. Eve removed his chest plate and replaced his cracked battery with a new one.

"It's going great, Eve!" I remarked. "Daggert himself had to admit the mine is paying handsomely."

"Yes," she said.

"Washington will be amazed. Then they'll think of other projects for robots. We'll work our way up, step by step!"

"Yes."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic, Eve," I protested. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," she returned with a little hitch of her left shoulder. It was a little mannerism I had come to know meant evasiveness.

I shrugged myself; but just then Dusty's voice sounded. At times he came up to talk to Eve. They had become friends.

"Your skull's kinda thick, pard," he piped to me. "You're down in that shaft twenty-four hours at a stretch, while she's up here alone with nothing but dumb Mexes and Japs for company."

"But I can't let her come down," I argued for the hundredth time. "It's dangerous. One of us has to be there, to keep the others going. But in case anything happens to me, Eve has to be left—to carry on. Eve, I've told you that you mustn't worry—"

"Look, pard," Dusty cut in blandly. "You call yourself human. A man may have a wife, but he needs men friends too. A woman may have a man, but she needs woman friends. It's as plain as the nose on your—I mean, the rivets on your tin ribs. Your head's wood instead of iron, if you can't see that!"

It was as simple as that. In all our previous activities, Eve had had the feminine companionship of Kay Hall, Jack's wife. Now she had none. I had forgotten she was a human girl, in all but body. Eve needed a girl-friend!

I remedied the situation on the spot. I had three extra iridium-sponge brains on hand, as replacements. They had not yet been given the vital spark of electricity—and life. I brought one to life now, giving it a replacement body, also on hand.

"There, Eve," I said gently. "Talk to her, teach her. She'll have the feminine viewpoint from you, just as you acquired it from Kay."

"I'll call her Mary!" Eve said delightedly. "Oh, Adam, you don't know how much this means to me!"

DUSTY gave a pat of satisfaction to his clothes. I had seen him do that dozens of times, and it never failed to raised a cloud of dust.

"Thanks, Dusty," I said earnestly. "I'll give you a bag of silver, which represents my week's pay—"

"No." He was suddenly sensitive about that. "I'll pan my own. You've done enough for me. Pretty soon I'll have enough to scoot to San Simone and have a bang-up good time."

WITHIN A month, Mary began to emerge from Eve's loving tutelage with a definite personality. With the swiftness of our robot minds, triggered by electrons, she passed through babyhood, girlhood and entered maturity—all in weeks. She was a likable creature, half Eve and half something else of her own.

I suppose it is like human parents watching their child grow up with its own distinct personality.

Strangely, Mary satisfied a hidden parental hunger in both Eve and myself. It tickled us to teach her to call us "Mom" and "Dad". There are as many purely mental aspects to parenthood as biologic. Yet neither of us could guess, at the time, what Mary's advent would mean later. . . .

But I must not get ahead of my story.

CHAPTER IV

Mary in Trouble

EVENTS moved rapidly after this. First, there was the day when a sharp crack resounded through the underground caverns. My robots and I straightened up. It came again, ominously.

Following the sound, we ran to a corridor deep within the honeycombed cliff. In the light of our torches, I saw the widening crack that ran the length of the passage. Half-rotted wooden joists were crumbling and buckling.

"This whole passage is going to collapse in a few seconds!" Robot Number Six said behind my ear. "We'd

better get a safe distance away!"

Even steel-strong robots must fear the crushing power of tons and tons of rock.

I turned with them, then whirled back with a cry.

"Wait! Dusty is at the end of that corridor. I just remembered. He'll be sealed off—"

I dashed as near as I dared to the cracking portion and raised my voice to a shout.

"Dusty! Come out! Hurry!"

I heard an answering shout, but from in back of me. Daggert had just come down, on one of his periodic visits. He took the situation in at a glance. He pulled at my arm.

"Get back, you tin fool!" he commanded. "Can't you see that roof is coming down?"

"But Dusty—"

"Never mind him!" Daggert responded heartlessly. "Serves the little rat right. Get back before you get squashed. You're more use to me than that broken-down derelict."

He was figuring dollars and cents, of course. He had no personal liking for me. I simply represented a good high production of ore. Dusty represented nothing in any terms that Daggert valued.

I shook off his arm. "I'm going after Dusty—"

"You loco brass mule!" Daggert was screaming. "Don't go!"

I didn't. I barked orders to my robots clustered behind me, instead. They hesitated, glancing at one another. They had obeyed me implicitly in all things. But this—

"Good Lord, you're insane!" Daggert gasped. "Are you willing to risk every robot here for the life of a worthless bum?"

"Come!" I thundered, dashing into the corridor. My robots followed.

Alloy feet pounding thunderously, we sped under that cracking ceiling. A hundred feet in, I halted.

"Shoulders to the ceiling. Hold firm, men!"

It must have been a strange sight to Daggert. Thirty robots spaced along that corridor, shoulders against the sagging ceiling, legs spread for purchase. With a low rumble, the ceiling gave way. But it didn't crunch to the floor. Thirty metal Atlases held it up! Gears clashed, cogs scraped, wheels within whined as machine-power fought the terrific pull of all-powerful gravity.

I watched with bated breath, to use the idiom. If gravity won, my thirty robots would be smashed to bits under the grinding load. Dusty and I, in the pocket at the end, would be buried beyond hope of ever seeing daylight again.

But my robots won. The ceiling stayed up. Thirty robots virtually held a mountain on their backs.

I TURNED. Dusty was calmly sleeping, slumped against the wall, his ore pan slipping from his fingers. I swept him into my arms and weaved down the corridor past the robots. I pulled erect before Daggert and set Dusty on his feet. He was rubbing his eyes, bewildered.

There was still danger for my robots. One by one, beginning at the far end, they raced forward at my order, and helped support the front end. As each robot left his position, a mass of rock fell. One by one they returned from the jaws of destruction.

The last three came out with a rush together, as the ceiling let loose completely. Two skipped to safety, but the last was caught under a falling, thundering avalanche. When we pulled away loose shale and dragged Number Eleven

out, we saw that his head had been cracked like an eggshell. His iridium-sponge brain was in shreds. He was dead.

"Leave the pieces there," Daggert said indifferently. "And get back to work!"

I stepped in front of him, facing my robots, as I saw heads jerk up. Mirrored eyes glared at Daggert.

"Take Number Eleven out quietly, men," I ordered. Fiercely I whispered to Daggert, "Keep your mouth shut. To my robots, a friend has just died!"

Daggert watched silently as four robots picked Number Eleven's mangled body up and slowly carried it out.

"First," he murmured, "you robots risk your necks, this project, and all your plans for a miserable human life. Then you carry a bunged-up robot out like it was a funeral. You act like you're humans!"

I looked in the man's eyes. Faintly, there was a glimmer of wonder deep in them.

"Nuts!" he finished, kicking at a rock and leaving.

IT WAS not till we had all filed above ground that Dusty said anything. His wrinkled eyes were moist. He gave his clothes a little pat, raising dust.

"Going to San Simone for a bang-up good time pretty soon," he said simply. "And I'm going to drink to you, Adam Link!"

I knew, in his peculiar scale of values, that he had paid me the highest compliment in the world. . . .

"Adam!" Eve said. "Adam!"

A robot's tone is flat, devoid of emotion. But I knew that my Eve, deep within, was sobbing. Both in joy that I was back from peril, and for what I had done.

"Adam!"

I started. It was Mary's voice now.

"You did a wonderful, brave thing."

"Thanks, child," I returned.

"Child?" she blazed back. "I'm not a child! I tell you I'm not. You mustn't treat me that way—Adam!"

AGAIN she had used my first name. I remembered now that for a week she had failed to use the terms "Mom" or "Dad" to Eve and myself. What metamorphosis had gone on in her matured mind? But I couldn't guess. She was mystery. And in that she was a woman.

Eve and I glanced at each other with a faint air of sadness. In so short a time our "child" had grown away from us. It made us feel old, as I suppose human parents do when suddenly they see their full-grown offspring forging a life of its own.

But Eve and I were also pleased. It was another proof that robot-minds could adopt the human viewpoint and outlook quickly. It meant that the coming robot race was not to be cold, alien, machinelike, in mind as in body.

Number Eleven, the first death among this first colony of robots, was buried beyond the mining camp, at the desert's edge.

I spoke a few solemn words. "From dust arose, and to dust returneth!"

Another event gave me food for thought.

One evening I came up to hear a terrific commotion from the direction of the men's barracks. I sped into a run as I heard a certain sound—that of stones striking metal. A full moon lit the scene, as I drew close.

Mary stood before the shack, stiff and straight. With a hue and cry, the Mexican and Japanese laborers were pelting her with stones and rocks they picked up. Among them were several dark-eyed women. Inevitably, some border women had drifted to the camp.

Mary was unharmed by the missiles, of course. They bounced off her hard body plates with a clinking sound. But mentally, the stones hurt. Humans pelting her as if she were a wild animal!

Mary gave a harsh cry and made for them just as I raced up. I grabbed her arm and yanked her around so violently a muscle-cable snapped.

"Mary," I demanded. "What—"

Daggert strode from among the men. His face was flushed with liquor.

"Listen, Link," he growled. "You and your damned robots keep your tin noses out of our affairs. This one has been sneaking around several nights, looking in the windows. Spying on us!"

"Mary!" I gasped. "Why?"

Mary's indirect answer was still more startling.

"A woman was just killed in there!"

"So what?" Daggert bellowed. "Lolita went after Amelia's man, and Amelia put a knife in her back. These are our human affairs. You robots have nothing to do with them. I'm warning you, Link. My men don't like any mixing with a bunch of phonographs on wheels, which is all you are. You robots keep your distance."

We had been delegated by Daggert into a caste. Into pariahs. I didn't care about the murdered woman—this was the raw, practically lawless border region—but Daggert had brought up the issue of robots in human society.

I was ready to argue heatedly, as always before on that—to me—touchy subject. Dusty had been tugging at my arm for minutes. I didn't feel it. But a bit of dust swirling into my mirrored eyes, causing the shutters to click, announced his presence.

"Take it easy, pard," he whispered. "Feeling's been running high among them cutthroats."

ALMOST as he warned me a mob growl came from their midst. They had picked up shovels, picks, crowbars. They were advancing, with all the murderous intent of a lynching mob. Daggert looked scared, suddenly. He hadn't expected a crisis so soon.

But abruptly the mob stopped in its tracks. I swiveled my head and saw why. Eve had raced down into the shaft and returned with the other robots. They stood behind me in a solid phalanx, silent, shiny, formidable. Thirty robots against thirty men! Three hundred men would not have dared attack us.

The human mob forgot its temper and lounged back. They pretended to be setting the tools in neater piles.

"What were you saying, Daggert?" I queried.

"I don't want any trouble with you, Adam Link," he grunted. "We're getting along okay, so far. Just keep that robot from sneaking around, like she has, and everything will be all right."

He turned away, shoving his men back into the barracks. They would plan how to bury the dead woman secretly and never tell the authorities.

"Mary," I began, "now—"

"Don't lecture me!" she pouted. "I didn't mean any harm. I just wanted to watch those humans a little. I'm old enough to know what I'm doing—Adam!"

I didn't lecture her. I said nothing. But I began to see that Mary had acquired wilfulness. She was human—too human at times!

CHAPTER V

The Fifth Column

A THIRD event erased the previous two events from my mind.

"Adam! Adam!"

I was working with my robots in Tunnel C. I might never have heard Dusty's voice above the thundering rattle of the pneumatic drill, with which I was breaking out silver-bearing shale. But when the little man banged against the back of my skull-piece with a rock, I finally turned.

I took off my protecting goggles. The gritty dust set loose in mining operations would raise havoc, lodging in our finely machined eye lenses. I waved Number Nineteen to take over, and let Dusty lead me to a quieter corridor. I could see he was excited.

It was five o'clock in the morning. My automatic sense of timing told me that. Why wasn't he sleeping?

"Been to Tojunga," he explained. "Went with the supply truck last night."

Tojunga was the Mexican town just below the border, fifty miles south. A dirty, squalid place, as I had heard, hardly worthy of human habitation.

"You went down there for your bang-up good time?" I asked, a little repelled at the thought. "Instead of north to San Simone?"

Dusty wrinkled his nose. "No. My bottle ran low. In a mean temper, Daggert wouldn't sell me one from his stock. So I had to go myself. The truck went down there to pick up some fresh fruit cheap."

"Well?" It all seemed pointless.

"One of our Jap laborers came along. For the ride, he says. But he acted queer. I took a drink in a dive, next to his table. Another Jap walks in, sits down."

"Well?" I was really impatient now.

"The second Jap was in a military uniform!"

I stared. What was Dusty leading up to? Why was there a chilled, dumbfounded air about him?

He went on, the words bubbling out. "I've knocked around these parts all my life. I understand some Japanese. Enough to learn that the Japs have a secret base just below the border, on the Gulf of California. I didn't catch it all clear. But the Jap officer says something about being ready. An attack at dawn!"

"Attack!" I grasped the little prospector's arm, squeezing. "You're drunk!"

He was screeching suddenly, as though his nerves had let go.

"You've got to listen to me, Adam! You're the only one with sense enough to listen and do something. I tell you, I heard it! They'll cross the border at down. The Japs are coming!"

I squeezed tighter. "You're drunk! Dusty, you've made this all up—"

My fingers relaxed suddenly. I stiffened. A second later I bent double and put my left tympanum-ear against the solid rock beneath us. Sound carries well through rock, for miles and miles. And my microphonic ear picks up the faintest of impulses and amplifies them to the beat of a drum, at will.

What I heard, perhaps fifty miles south, was the rumble of *tanks!*

AT THE same time, just outside, I heard an ominous *rat-tat—tat-tat!* I had heard one before. It was a machine gun!

I raced above, and halted short at the scene I saw in the red glow of dawn.

Our ten Japanese "laborers" were clustered behind the machine gun. They had just fired, in warning, over the heads of the remaining men.

Daggert's voice came from among his men, as he struggled forward.

"What the hell is this?" he yelled. "What's going on here? Where did you get that machine gun? Listen, you yellow runts, this is mutiny! I'll have you arrested. I'll—"

A precise, cold voice cut in. One of the Japanese stood erect. Beneath his laborer's denim was the unmistakable bearing of a trained soldier.

"You will please be quiet and listen to me," the Japanese said with ironic politeness. "This mine is in our hands. Do not resist and you will not be harmed. Submit quietly. Soon the first detachments will come through here. So sorry, but your mining operations will have to be suspended—indefinitely."

"In your hands? Submit? Detachments?" Daggert was utterly bewildered. "You talk like there's a war going on here!"

War! The word to me was like a sledge blow against my brain.

Instantly I understood. Fifth column work! The Japanese "laborers" were all part of the scheme. Traitors, in brief. The mine was in enemy hands already. This was one phase of that newly invented method of human warfare—*blitzkrieg!*

My mind staggered. The whole universe seemed to spin about me. Blitzkrieg! Unsuspected by the people of the land to the north, an enemy was invading. No formal declaration of war. That too was part of the technique.

The same revelation must have ground through Daggert's mind. Shock settled over his face.

"You mean—an army is coming?" he breathed.

The Japanese officer nodded. "It will arrive in an hour. Please be calm."

The men around Daggert promptly flopped to the ground, rolling and lighting their usual cigarettes. They were Mexicans. They were uninterested in the event, as long as it meant no harm to them. Daggert stood alone facing the machine gun.

He looked at me suddenly.

Man and robot, we looked at each other. I saw a strange, appealing gleam in his eye. For the first time, he looked upon me as a man, a friend, an ally, in this moment of dark crisis. In one mental upheaval, I knew that now he regarded me as something closer to him than any of the Japanese or Mexicans.

"Adam Link," he half stammered. "Adam, are you—with me?"

Strange, that my moments of triumph often come with moments of impending tragedy. Daggert had become my friend at last He was appealing to me—man to man.

The Japanese officer stiffened. Obviously my part in the setup was unsolved. I was, as yet, an unpredictable factor in the queer drama being played out in this isolated region.

I didn't answer immediately. I was thinking.

DAGGERT'S EYES flicked around and suddenly shone.

"Adam!" he shouted. "Jump in that truck near you! Drive away. The bullets can't hurt you. Drive north and warn the country. Warn the United States that it's being invaded. Hurry, Adam!"

The muzzle of the machine gun swung toward me threateningly. I hadn't moved. But not because of fear, for I could laugh at bullets.

"Adam!" Daggert groaned. "Why are you hesitating? Hurry!"

"I'm not going, Daggert," I said slowly.

He gasped, staring. But I had made up my mind not to be a metal Paul Revere.

"I have made a vow, Daggert. Robots must never be used in warfare. If I did what you ask, I would be committing myself—and all my robots—to intervention on your side. I'm sorry, but robots cannot take sides in the civil wars of the human race!"

Daggert sat down on the ground, shaking his head as if it were all too much for him. Little more was said. An hour later, a cloud of dust appeared on the southern horizon.

CHAPTER VI

Adam Link in War!

I WATCHED something that I knew would later be a great historical event. The invasion of America!

First came motorcycles with mounted machine guns. Then small swift tanks, rattling along the rough, unpaved dirt road. Behind lumbered monstrous eighty-ton tanks, the muzzles of small cannon bristling at all sides, ready to rake the countryside.

Following behind were armored trucks, loaded with soldiers carrying automatic rifles and tripod machine guns. Foot-soldiers could be seen far to the rear, tramping along steadily—thousands and thousands of them, steel helmets glinting in the rising sun. Artillery units, supply trains, hospital corps, communications corps, and reserves brought up the rear.

It was a complete mechanized division. The kind that in the European War of 1940 had cut opposing armies to ribbons.

Overhead soared a flight of aircraft—bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance.

Blind, stupid fools! The term aptly applies to the entire human race. When will you learn that the fruits of power are bitter, poisonous?

Again I vowed, seeing this array of mechanized murder, that I would steer my robot course clear of such utterly animal tactics. At the first opportunity, I would leave with my robots.

Still I watched, fascinated by this spectacle of human will to suicide.

ESCORTED BY motorcycles, a bullet-proof car rolled up at the van and stopped before the mine. A half-dozen resplendently uniformed Japanese stepped down. The men at the machine gun saluted.

"You have done well," the Japanese general commended. I understood the Japanese words. I have learned fluently every language on Earth available in books. "We have taken our first objective, without cost of life!"

He turned to Daggert, speaking now in precise English.

"You are the superintendent of this American mining project. Please consider yourself a prisoner of war. I will leave a small force of occupation here. The army goes on immediately. So sorry to interfere with your estimable labors, but this mine lies directly on the road to conquest!"

Daggert eyed the Japanese. His eye wandered to the formidable forces rumbling close.

"Conquest?" he croaked, half belligerently. "How far do you think you'll get?"

The Japanese officers smiled at one another.

"What is there to oppose us? Your people rest in false security. In a week we'll reach the Canadian border. California and the western seaboard will be sliced off from your country. That is assured. It will be easy. Perhaps then, if all goes well, our armies will sweep eastward . . ."

The general's voice trailed away.

Daggert half nodded to himself, as if for an hour he had pictured that very thing.

"You've already taken this territory," he said slowly. "What about me? Suppose I continued to run this mine—for you!"

I was not surprised. Daggert was an opportunist.

THE general smiled pleasedly.

"Good! We welcome all cooperation with us, in conquered territory. Your salary will continue at the same rate!"

I imagine this sickens you who read. It sickened me. At least, though utterly neutral in this human quarrel, I would not think of helping the enemy, no matter in what small way. Daggert was a renegade of the first water.

"Daggert!" I found myself saying. "Surely you aren't deserting your country for the first piece of gold?"

"You should talk!" Daggert laughed harshly. "You're the one who wouldn't carry a warning!"

The Japanese turned to me now. Bland little men! They hardly showed more than mild curiosity at seeing and hearing an incredible being made of metal. Then I realized why.

"We have been told of your robots, through our agents," the general said. "You are all our prisoners, too, since we must treat you as humans."

"Just a minute!" I snapped. "I and my robots are entirely neutral in this affair between you humans. We will not oppose you or help you. Nor will we remain as prisoners."

Still smiling, the general subtly waved a hand back to his armed forces.

Just as subtly, I picked up an inch-thick crowbar and bent it in a loop. Then I whacked it against Eve's body, with a word of warning to her. The blow would have killed an elephant. It barely dented Eve's frontal plate. No bullet could land with more of an impact.

"You see," I said quietly, "we can escape your bullets with ease. We can run faster than any vehicle you have."

"Then you are not our prisoners," the general returned dryly.

I had to admire his swift, sensible judgment. Certainly the enemy leaders were not unintelligent.

"I will hold you at your word," he resumed. "That you are entirely neutral. Please leave immediately." Turning, he raised a hand. "The army will march on—"

"No!"

It was a high-pitched scream. Dusty ran forward, shrieking the word over and over. In surprise, the Japanese general withheld the command to march.

Dusty stood panting before the officer, his face twisted.

"You can't go on!" he shrilled. "Daggert ratted, the Mexes don't care, and Adam Link is neutral. Nobody to stop you, is there? Nobody but me! This is my country you're invading, you yellow cowards. You won't go another step — except over my dead body!"

Dusty stood stiff as a tree, his wrinkled old face turned up defiantly to the sun. It was sheer magnificence. One little scrawny man challenging an army! You humans can be abysmally vile. But at times you can be sublimely glorious. I'll never forget that scene.

It happened so suddenly that even I was caught flatfooted.

The Japanese general whipped a pistol from his holster and fired pointblank at Dusty.

The crack of the gun resounded through the air. The first shot of the war! The first of countless lives to be sacrificed! Perhaps the Japanese general did it as a symbol to his army. As a token of how easily they would brush aside all future opposition.

DUSTY gasped. Slowly his knees bent. He did not fall. I had leaped to his side in one twenty-foot bound, and now held him. I saw the trickle of blood at the front. The bul-

let had struck near the region of his heart. He had only moments of life left.

"Dusty!" I cried. "Dusty! What have they done? What have I done?"

His pale eyes turned up to my seemingly emotionless ones.

"Adam," he whispered. "Don't blame yourself. I can see your side of it. You couldn't do anything else. You couldn't throw all them hopes and plans aside—like you did once for me, down in the mine. Stick to your guns, Adam. Keep your nose clean, you and your robots, from any of this rotten stuff. Some day—some day humans will have as much sense as you have!"

He gave a little suppressed moan of pain, then moved his lips almost soundlessly again.

"So long, pard! Don't cry for me. I'm going to have a good time. A bang-up good time—"

The eyes filmed, rolled back. The lips quivered shut. Only a limp corpse rested in my arms. A slow swirl of dust rose from where I gripped his clothing.

Dusty was dead.

Eve and Mary, beside me, turned their eyes to the ground. My thirty robots looked at one another sorrowfully. We had all liked Dusty. Even Daggert scuffed at the ground, biting his lips.

Dusty was something that is hard to define, in you humans. He was a free soul. He was part of a philosophy of live-and-let-live that is close to the divine. And suddenly, the contrast between him and what was rolling up from the south stood out like white against black.

How can I explain? How can I describe to you the sudden, devastating rage that overwhelmed my mechanical brain till the hum of electrons nearly heated my skull-piece?

How can I make it sound rational? I had been willing to let untold thousands of others die, in keeping with my policy of non-intervention. Thousands of others! But when Dusty fell . . . No, I can't explain it.

I straightened up.

The Japanese general was just turning indifferently from the scene. In one leap I was before him. In one motion I jerked the pistol from his holster. The weapon of murder. I held it up—squeezed. The gun crumpled into shreds which I flung at these would-be conquerors.

My stentorian voice, like an amplifying unit turned to full power, roared down the road over the invading columns.

"I, Adam Link the robot, declare war on you!"

CHAPTER VII

Adam Link, Strategist

THE Japanese general tensed, perhaps aware of what this could mean. Spryly, barking orders, he and his men ran to their car. The machine gun of the fifth columnists turned. Its harsh chatter split the air. Bullets raked back and forth across the ranks of my robots. And Eve, Mary and myself.

I laughed within myself. I strode directly into the hail of slugs. A metallic clang filled the air. They were shooting at my abdomen, sheathed with thick protective plates. Before they thought of aiming for my more vulnerable head, I was there. I yanked the weapon out of their hands. I beat it against the ground till it fell apart. Then I hurled the mangled remains at the motorcycle troops.

All the Japanese had watched in paralyzed fascination, at this display of fantastic strength. They paled, be-

neath their yellow skins. In the Japanese legends, too, there is the counterpart of the Golem, the Colossus, the Juggernaut, the Frankenstein! The mighty, invincible non-human creation making war on frail mankind!

Such thoughts, for a moment, must have overwhelmed them. They were almost ready to bolt, shrieking in fear.

But they were too well trained. The general was screeching orders. The men heard. Their mounted machine guns began to bark. The concentrated fire of hundreds of them began to sweep over us.

I was yelling orders too. My thoughts work with the rapidity of light. A few seconds before I had never dreamed I would be fighting a vast army. Now I was. And already I had figured out a complete plan of attack.

Bullets showered against our steel bodies. Eventually they would strike vital spots—our eyes, or swivel joints, or thin back plates. My robots accepted my declaration of war instantly. They had to, in sheer self-defense.

Our phalanx broke. Thirty-three metal forms leaped, each to a motorcycle. One swift tug and the vehicle was overturned, soldiers sprawling on their faces. Another second to rip the machine gun loose, smash it against the cycle's motor, wrecking both beyond repair. Then on, to the next nearest motorcycle.

In five minutes, the area before the mine was strewn with motorcycle wreckage. Bewildered Japanese soldiers, weaponless, straggled away. The last dozen cycles attempted to speed away. My robots followed my example. I pounded after one, caught the rear, and snapped my wrist. Over went the cycle, over and over, ending up a ruin. The two soldiers, well trained, simply rolled over the ground, then picked themselves up and ran.

They ran as if the devil were after them. But we did not pursue. They could not harm us, only their machines of destruction.

"Do not take human life deliberately!" I thundered at my robots. "Just destroy their apparatus!"

Eve and I had overturned the general's car first. He and his staff had run back down the road. I saw them reach the first of the armored tank columns. They stopped the tanks. The whole army ground to a stop.

This was battle! They were meeting their first opposition.

I LOOKED around the immediate vicinity. The motorcycle contingent had been completely routed, wrecked. Here and there a robot was kicking a motor in with his metal feet-plates, to insure its worthlessness. We had destroyed much valuable equipment.

"Good work!" I called to them. "But the rest won't be so easy. Those tanks have powerful guns that can blow us to bits with a direct hit. Now—"

A one-pounder shell screamed over our heads and exploded against the barracks, blowing in the side. The Mexicans had long before left the scene. Daggert had run with the Japanese. Only us robots were left at the mine.

Another shell exploded in the ground to the side, digging a pit.

My robots shuddered. We fear death too. Soon a stinging barrage would come from the enemy, against which even our metal bodies could not stand.

"Listen, men!" With a rapidity no human can duplicate, I gave orders. Before the barrage had really begun, my robot force scattered.

We crept behind a hill, then charged down on the road. We went in twos, each pair for a tank. The Japanese had had no time to begin deploying apart from their close, clogged formation.

Most of their gunfire was thus ineffective, since it might hit their own numbers. The guns that did bellow were being aimed at ground targets faster and trickier than any they had ever seen or dreamed of.

Two to a tank. Eve and I reached our first. Ducking under its guns, we slipped our fingers under the caterpillar treads and heaved. The small five-ton vehicle easily turned over on its side.

One out of action! We ducked to the next, repeating the performance.

And all through the small-tank contingent, the other pairs of robots were doing the same. Tank after tank went over, useless with its treads churning empty air, its guns turned skyward. The Japanese scrambled out, those that could, and milled about helplessly. They had pistols and fired these at us. Mosquitoes would have been as effective.

Robots in action, letting out their full powers, move with the speed of any high-grade machine. The tanks went over like tenpins. In twenty-three minutes, three hundred tanks were out of action. They blocked and jammed the road for hundreds of yards.

I had not lost a robot yet. Robots are not just machines. They are swift, intelligent minds. Our dodging and weaving through their fire must have seemed uncanny to the slow reflexes of the Japanese humans. Long before they could fire a heavy gun pointed at us, we had seen and leaped clear.

As with the motorcycles, the last few dozen tanks attempted to speed away from the terrible metal nemises. I understand they are built to do seventy-five miles an hour. A robot can do a hundred. It was simple for a pair of robots to chase a tank down, throw a piece of iron into the treads to stop it, then flop it on its side. I had given orders to that effect.

"That's that!" I bawled with my amplifying larynx unit at full power. The sound could be heard for a mile, even in that din. "Splendid work, men! But no time to loaf. Get after the trucks and big tanks. Watch out for those bigger guns!"

I WILL not attempt to give all the details.

In brief, we went after each unit in turn, with more precision than the blitzkrieg masterminds had ever dreamed possible. I felt almost sorry for the Japanese High Command, seeing their mighty, superb mechanized army falling apart like rotten fruit. Three things gave us a tremendous advantage, even against vastly superior armament. Speed, mobility and intelligence. We could move faster than their fastest tanks. We could maneuver quicker than any man-made swivel. And we were always a jump ahead mentally.

The trucks of special attack troops, with their automatic weapons, were easy victims. Four robots on a side could dump them over with one synchronized heave. Men sprawled miserably in the alkali dust. Some turned on us with their machine guns, peppering us with lead. That is, for about two seconds.

Then robot hands with crushing strength would jerk the guns away and beat them against the ground, till bolts and flying pieces sprayed for yards.

My robots, grim and silent at first, soon began to cheer and yell. It was great sport. And it was laughable to see the astounded, babbling Japanese staggering around, trying to figure out who had dropped the sky on them.

We took no lives, as I constantly reiterated, lest my robots forget. We brushed the enemy aside, merely flailing their lethal toys to shreds. We

bashed in truck motors with any metal club we could pick up. Our work was as thorough as a barrage of big artillery shells.

"Oh, Adam, this is positively the funniest thing I've ever seen!" Eve, always beside me, was laughing hysterically inside. So was I.

"This is fun!" Mary commented excitedly. She had stuck close to me too. "It was getting a little monotonous at the mine, anyway."

There had been moments of extreme danger, and one of them came again. A nearby tank somehow righted itself—one tread digging into loose sand and gaining traction—and the vengeful Japanese within instantly rammed it straight for us three robots. I flexed both arms, shoving Eve and Mary to right and left out of harm's way. I had no time myself to escape.

There was only one possible salvation, before the five-ton juggernaut crunched over me. I stooped, leaning forward. When the blunt-ended prow reared over me, I placed my shoulder against it and straightened with a snap that very nearly pulled every muscle cable loose.

But it worked. The tank flipped nose up and around, turning a somersault. Hurtling me, it landed ten feet beyond with a rending crash. The Japanese know a form of wrestling called jiu-jitsu. I had, in effect, used one of their principles for throwing a much heavier opponent.

THE terrific strain of that heave, however, left me staggering. I stumbled and fell over a stone.

"Adam! Are you hurt? Adam—"

I knew it must be Eve kneeling over me, in agonized alarm. Then I saw another metal form shoulder her aside. Mary cuddled my head in her arms.

"Adam! Adam dear!"

I don't know what other things she murmured, like a girl who had for the first time seen a loved one harmed. I was myself in an instant, jumping up.

"I'm all right," I said half irritably to the two of them.

"Oh, Adam, I'm so glad!" Mary breathed. "I don't know what I'd do if ever you were harmed—"

She suddenly broke off, at Eve's stare. For a moment Mary looked from one to the other of us, then raised her head defiantly as if to say something. Something that would shock and stun us more than the tank's paralyzing attack.

But she never said it.

Brrrooommmmm!

We heard the heavy thump. We stiffened. It brought us back to the war. There was a high-pitched whistle. Then a frightful explosion. Robot Number Seven, a hundred feet away, was blown to bits. They were firing field guns, far to the rear! Artillery shells were one thing we had to fear. And one thing we could not outrun.

Our overconfidence vanished. The Japanese general had finally spoken with his biggest weapons. Peering down the long, stalled columns of the army, I saw where his trained gun crews had deployed, setting up their field pieces in a wide semicircle. The big tanks and all the army behind were protected.

Another shell landed. It failed to get one of us. Instead it blew a truck to atoms. Also a dozen poor Japanese who'd been running from the scene. The High Command was willing to bombard their own advance forces, to get us. Life is cheap, in the blitzkrieg bible.

The barrage never blossomed. Before the third tentative feeler shell came over, I was shouting orders. Thirty-two robots sped for those field guns. We zigzagged, thirty feet at a bound. The highly trained gunners were not

trained to pick off huge metal jackrabbits.

Reaching the guns, we shoved the humans away. Grasping the barrel with a full grip in both arms, a robot would crack it loose from its breech. Then, using it as a mighty club, he would batter the instrument flat.

The field guns went as fast as all before into the junkheap.

And, shortly, the big tanks. Dodging their small-cannon fire, six robots would tackle each individually. Metal backs strained, steel muscle cables shrieked in protest at the load, electricity crackled from our joints. But over they went! Eighty tons of massive metal, big as a house.

Over they went, like clumsy turtles. Then the crews would pop out of the turrets, like smoked-out rats. A robot would go in, with a metal bar. The smashing sounds within told of elaborate controls and instruments showering into debris. When the robot came out, the tank was just an empty hollow shell. Engines, oil and treads were a sort of gritty porridge, leaking from all sides.

Those tanks would have had a low quotation from a scrap-iron concern, being such a scattered mess.

"Well," I yelled proudly, "that just about takes care of everything—"

Brrrooooommmmm!

A BOMB exploded among us, getting Robot Number Twenty-eight. I looked up. I had forgotten the invaders' aircraft. Fifty bombers droned overhead like vengeful wasps, dropping their eggs of destruction.

"Scatter!" I commanded. "Use the anti-aircraft guns I told you not to destroy."

My robots' shiny forms spread, making small individual targets to the planes above. I ran with Eve and Mary to the nearest mounted anti-aircraft unit. In forethought, I had told my men not to wreck these guns, as they could not be used against us in the first place.

I examined the intricate machinery carefully. In three seconds I had figured out its principles.

I explained swiftly to Eve and Mary. Eve took over the sights. Mary fed the ammunition. I sat at the firing mechanism.

My first burst of shots from the pom-pom unit brought down a bomber in flames. It was ridiculously easy to make a hit. Other guns began to pepper, operated by my robots. We blasted planes down with the ease of machines that can't make a mistake. In a war of machines, what can be more effective than machines with minds?

We were in our element.

When ten bombers went down within five minutes, the rest of the Japanese air force turned tail. That was the last resistance. When we ran down the road toward the foot-soldiers, waving our arms wildly at them, they did not merely retreat.

They ran, they stumbled, they clawed at one another to get away!

"Halt!" I said to my men.

CHAPTER VIII

The Poison of Jealousy

MY robots and I stopped and looked. Back of us the road and countryside were strewn with metal debris. Before us, the entire Japanese army was in rout. They wouldn't stop till they had reached the border.

I let out a purely animal shout. Thirty-three robots had defeated an entire mechanized division! Thirty-three robots had blocked the invasion of the United States! Thirty-three robots had made history!

My eyes turned. No, not thirty-

three. I called roll. There were silences for Numbers Seven, Ten, Sixteen, Twenty-four and Twenty-eight. Casualties—five. Blown to bits by direct hits with large-caliber guns.

We heard a groan. Number Sixteen was not dead. His lower half was gone. His upper half was a tangled ruin, with a cracked battery barely trickling current through his brain-circuit. Perhaps he could be saved—

Then we saw the gaping hole in his skull, the shredded brain areas within.

I bent over Number Sixteen.

"Licked them, didn't we, Adam Link?" he croaked. "I don't mind dying, as long as our kind go on, doing good—"

His voice clicked off. It was like a telephone receiver being hung up. He was dead.

Around me, my robots were silent, sad. We felt deeply now the loss of five who had worked side by side with us, talked with us, lived with us for three months. We were the first small tribe of intelligent robots in human history. And robot history. Those five martyrs would be revered down through time, in robot archives.

I looked at Eve. We were the Adam and Eve of robots. And these were our sons. Five had gone back to nonexistence, in the performance of duty.

But what duty?

Like a lightning blast, the question struck me.

All the drive, the energy and excitement of defeating the mechanized army drained from me. All the rage and hatred for this human folly of murder by machine. Only a hollowness remained, in which boomed the terrible words:

"Adam Link, you have allowed robots to be used in warfare!"

Victory crushed me with its defeat.

My thoughts went back. I had refused military service, back in Washington. I had sworn never to wield the sword. I had come to the mine, to prove robot worthiness in peacetime pursuits. To prove to man that his use of the machine for destruction could be overbalanced by use of the machine for construction.

Now, in one stroke, I had sacrificed all this.

I had introduced into the technique of war a machine unit far more deadly and invincible than any conceived by human thought.

Around the world would go shrieking the news—THIRTY-THREE ROBOTS DEFEAT MECHANIZED ARMY!

I had branded the robot as an instrument of war! I had taken sides, in a human quarrel. I had destroyed any future trust in the robot as a non-Frankenstein innovation. I had in one moment obliterated my two years of effort to prove robots would not be a menace.

"EVE!" I groaned, overwhelmed by my crime. "Eve, I've murdered the future robot race! When the world hears of this—"

She understood what I meant. She interrupted me.

"Why should the world hear? We don't have to tell. And certainly the Japanese won't, to become a laughing stock. No formal declaration of war was issued. The United States has no inkling of the near-invasion. Don't you see, Adam? What the world of humans doesn't know won't hurt them!"

"But the enemy must have one or two mechanized divisions in reserve," I protested. "We should warn the country. They'll try again—"

"And they still have to come through here," Eve declared. "This is the only serviceable route, for their timed plans.

A blitzkrieg takes months of preparation and planning. They can't change overnight. They must come through here!"

I looked around. The Pacific to the right. A desert to the left. Mountains in between. The mine straddled the pass through them. We could hold off ten mechanized divisions!

"Men!" I said. "We're going to fight the invasion to a standstill—ourselves. No newspaper reporter, no single source of authority is going to know. Let the failure of a Japanese invasion become a sheer, unbelieved legend. We must do this, to keep our robot name clear of warfare!"

IT WAS noon.

For several hours, the repair shop hummed busily. We had not escaped unscathed. Our "wounds" were quickly healed; muscle cables replaced, bent plates hammered out, leaky batteries patched, short-circuits eliminated.

"Hurry—hurry!" I kept yelling.

We were facing more blitzkrieg. The Japs would hammer back instantly. And this time they would know what they faced. They would come in battle formation, no longer easy prey on a clogged road. They would bombard, attack, strafe, flank, spearhead, pincer, and all the rest of it.

The repairs were completed. We were new men. Our total number was just thirty. A new Number Eleven had been brought to life, to replace the Number Eleven of the mine death. The third of the replacement brains —Mary was the second—was also brought to life. If only I had more iridium-sponge brains! But it would take weeks to make more.

Thirty of us. We would stand or fall with that force.

I led them back to the battlefield. We retrieved equipment. We had not been thorough enough, luckily, to destroy every last gun. There were machine guns, mortars, field pieces, anti-aircraft, and mounted cannon with slight damage. Working like beavers, we lugged them all to the mine in two hours.

I had them set up strategically. We had every inch of the slopes leading to the mine and pass covered. It would take a mighty big *putsch* to get past our little Mannerheim Line!

BY nightfall, we were ready.

"I wish I knew if they were attacking tonight," I said nervously.

"Why not find out—by sending a scout?" Mary suggested.

"Good idea!" I agreed. It was so obvious, I felt ashamed for not having thought of it. "I'll send someone to watch for their advance units—"

"Let me go!" Mary begged. "Please let me go, Adam. I love excitement!"

I suppose I hesitated only at the thought that she was a girl, as a human would. Then I laughed at myself. Physically, Mary was the equal of any of us. And mentally she was just as alert. There was little danger. I could sense her eagerness. Yet if I could have read a little deeper . . .

"Okay, Mary," I nodded. "Go twenty miles south. At the first glimpse of their advance units, race back and warn us. If they don't show up by dawn, come back."

She skipped away.

I WAITED, wondering if we could stave off any and all attack. Wondering if we would succumb, let the hordes through into a defenseless country. And thereby give the robot a black eye for all time. . . .

My sharp hearing distinguished a sound at the bottom of the slope, two hours later. Footsteps. But not the ponderous ones of Mary's metal feet.

Human steps. A human figure came with upraised hands into the glare of our lights.

"Daggert!" I gasped. "You dare come back, a traitor? You went with the Japanese—"

He shook his head. He was weary, worn, shoes cracked with hours of hiking.

"I left them, soon after the battle. Walked back. All the way I've cursed myself." His tired blue eyes raised to mine. "Adam Link, I can say only one thing. I'm the most miserable human being on Earth!"

He slumped down, shoulders trembling. My loathing for him vanished. After all, it is human to make mistakes. It is something more than human to be the better for it.

"Shake!" I said.

He gripped my hand thankfully, then glanced around eagerly.

"You're going to fight them off? Great! I'm with you. But they won't attack today at all. I heard the Japanese general say it would take two days to organize all his forces for a concerted drive."

I breathed in relief.

"Fine! It gives us a chance to really prepare. We can set up tank barriers with the debris out on the road. I'd better recall Mary—" I explained her departure on scout duty.

"Send Eve," Daggert suggested. "The rest of us can begin to strengthen our defenses." His eyes shone. "We're going to show those Japs, the dirty, yellow—"

The rest was enough to almost make my metal ear-tympanums burn red.

EVE and Mary did not return by dawn. I began to worry.

"Probably picking flowers like any girls," Daggert grinned. He realized now that robots were mental humans. "Nothing could have happened to them."

A metal figure glinted in the south, soon after. It was Mary. She came up alone, leisurely.

I ran to meet her. "Where's Eve?" I demanded. "I sent her to call you back."

"Eve?" Mary was surprised. "I didn't see her."

What had happened to Eve!

"I came back at dawn, as you said," Mary shrugged. "Besides, they won't attack for two days—"

I jerked. I grabbed Mary's arm. *Those were Daggert's words!*

"How did you know that?" I hissed. "Mary, how could you know that unless you met Daggert—"

Mary's hand went to her mouth, like any human girl who had unwittingly let something slip. I shook her roughly.

"Mary, tell me!"

And then I released her, bounding away. In one stride I had caught Daggert, as he was edging away. I brought him back before Mary.

"Talk!" I thundered at him.

"Are you off your nut?" Daggert tried to be casual, innocent.

Only for a second. Then he paled. I was squeezing his arm. My metal fingers pressed steadily into flesh. I would not stop till I had reached the bone, and snapped that arm like a twig. And after that, every bone in his tender human body.

"Talk!"

He talked. He babbled, with the fear of death in his eyes.

"I met Mary when she was on her way south to do her scouting. I was on scout duty for the Japs." I squeezed again. "Sabotage duty," he whined, knowing he must tell all the truth. "The Jap general told me to get back in your confidence, then try to spike your defenses somehow. He fears you."

Why hadn't I suspected? Why hadn't I detected the insincerity in Daggert, who had not one spark of honor in him? Why hadn't I remembered that fifth column methods are part and parcel of the blitzkrieg cult?

Daggert went on in a rush. He knew I wouldn't release his bruised, throbbing arm till he had finished.

"I met Mary, as I said. She wanted to haul me here, before you. I talked her out of it. Told her if she played ball with me, I'd help her."

"Help her do what?" I yelled.

Daggert looked at me queerly.

"Don't you know?" he muttered. "That Mary is—well, madly in love with you? That she wants your love—all to herself? Even I saw that."

All to herself! I staggered. A scene came before my eyes. Mary being pelted by the Mexican and Jap laborers with stones for "spying" on a murder. She had watched something of their raw mode of life. She had seen Amelia, the border girl, stick a knife in the back of Lolita—

"Mary!" I groaned. "What did you do to Eve?"

"She's out of the way!" Mary said flatly. "You're mine now, Adam. Aren't you pleased that I did it? That I want you so much?"

YES, I knew anger. A towering rage that seemed about to burst my brain. But it faded.

What could I say? How could I tell poor, misguided Mary that the little she had seen was not the accepted human way of winning love? How could I even blame her? How is the untaught child to know right from wrong?

"Eve!" I whispered, gripping myself. "You destroyed her in some way? Tell me."

"No," Mary returned. "I held her while the Japanese tied her with chains. She is with them now, their prisoner."

CHAPTER IX

Adam Link, Blitzkriegist

I COULDN'T speak. I squeezed Daggert's arm again, as the signal to explain.

"Mary and I figured it out this way," he whined. "I was to go to the camp, win your favor, then have Eve go to recall Mary, just as it happened. Mary waited with the Japanese who were with me. They had chains. Our mission had been to try to capture a robot, somehow. Mary made it easy for us.

"When Eve came, Mary pinned her arms from the back, in the dark. The Japs chained her. As Mary's part of the bargain, to make up for Eve being out of the way, she was to come here and help me sabotage the defenses, in the next two days. But of course she spilled the beans, like any dumb dame would—"

I cut off Daggert's half bitter words.

"What are they going to do with Eve?" I demanded.

Daggert winced under my fingers. But I hated to hear the answer, confirming the horrible suspicion crawling in my mind.

"Duplicate her," he said. "Duplicate robots!"

I flung Daggert away. I flung him so hard to the ground that his arm broke.

"You've just sold robots into slavery!" I raged. "And the human race into hell!"

I whirled on Mary. "And you've destroyed any slightest filial love I might have had for you."

I looked from one to the other. "Of all humans, and all robots, you two are the lowest—"

Mary broke into my denunciation.

"Adam! I didn't know of that part of it. Daggert deceived me, too. He said the Japanese would simply destroy Eve, after I had made her powerless. I didn't want to do it myself. I thought the destruction of Eve was my pay—as Daggert put it—for returning to camp and helping him."

She paused, and I knew she was burning with shame inside.

"I was going to expose Daggert later, after I was sure Eve had been taken care of."

"You were going to double-cross him on top of it!" I groaned.

"But only because I love you, Adam!" she cried. "Can't you see? No harm was done except that Eve is out of the way!"

Again, how could I blame her? At the "age" of three months, in a new and often strange world, I might also have violated the laws of civilization in sheer ignorance.

I turned away, brokenly.

Eve lost to me! My mental mate of two years. I felt utterly alone suddenly. All the world vanished—Daggert, Mary, my robots, the Japanese threat—and I was alone in a void. How could I live without my Eve? Everything would be meaningless without her!

How long I sank through this black pit, I do not know. But lightning stabbed into the darkness. I sprang up, shouting for my robots. I addressed them. My phonic voice revealed no emotion.

"Men, Eve is in the enemy's hands. The enemy will send her metal brain to their home country. Their scientists will solve its secret. Then they will make more. Thousands more. Millions more. They will put them in giant metal bodies and send them into war. They will conquer the world with robots. Then the human and robot races both will be slaves!"

My voice went down a pitch.

"There is only one hope. One way to stop them We must try to rescue Eve—or the brain of Eve—from their hands. I appeal to you not as a man who has lost his mate, but as a leader forming a crusade against utter evil."

My final words were a shout.

"We must attack the enemy—*now!*"

TWENTY-NINE robots attacking an army. Picture it if you can. No, you can't. I will only try to describe it in general terms.

Crouching behind a hill in the hot sun, we looked out at a harbor in the Gulf of California. Secretly, the Japanese had come here a year ago, and built their base, just below the Mexican border. What arrangements had been made with the Mexican authorities no one will ever know. It is one of those dark cabals of unwritten history.

In the harbor were a dozen troop and supply ships. These had shuttled back and forth across the Pacific, bringing the mechanized army. New wooden barracks sheltered the troops and equipment. Vast preparations were in progress—for the assault against us at the pass. They didn't know that instead of waiting for attack, we were attacking ourselves!

"It will be fairly easy," said Number Five at my elbow. "We can rush in there and demoralize them."

I shook my head and pointed. Closer to us, and protecting the harbor area, was a semicircular line of square concrete structures and smaller domed ones.

"Blockhouses and pillboxes," I said. "A miniature Siegfried Line protecting the harbor. The Japanese, in their thorough way, prepared for any counter-attack of this key base, once the invasion of America had begun."

"We'll storm the line!" Number Twenty-Seven said loudly. "What are we waiting for?"

"You can't overturn pillboxes like tanks!" I snapped in reproof. "Those guns will fire till they are ripped out. Dozens of guns will concentrate on each robot." I looked around. "There will be casualties among us!"

Twenty-eight shiny heads nodded grimly. This was total war!

I outlined our procedure. We had to crack that line as quickly as possible—and yet have robots left to finish the job of driving the invaders right off the continent.

I leaped up. Twenty-eight metal forms leaped after me.

Silently, grimly, we raced for the middle of the fortified line. The alarm sounded before we got there. A siren wailed, drowned out a moment later by the roar of guns. The skeleton defense staff were already on the job. Reserves were motorcycling up from the barracks, to man all the gun turrets.

It would not be easy.

We neared the first line of pillboxes. Machine guns rattled, bouncing bullets off our frontal plates. Then, from the blockhouses small cannon belched thunderously. Number Nine, beside me, disappeared. His broken metal parts spattered against me.

One robot gone!

But now we reached the pillboxes. It took only seconds to brace our feet and wrench the guns out by the barrels. Concrete then cracked under the blows of huge metal clubs we carried. We razed the front line in less time than it takes to tell.

Then on to the second line of emplacements.

The total line, I had estimated, was a half-mile deep. Every hundred feet was a new row of flaming guns. Guns that might pick us off faster than we could raze the concrete enclosures, to protect our rear. Time was an ally of the Japanese.

LET me translate the battle into blitzkrieg terms. Perhaps that way it will be simpler to understand.

I had, in brief, a formidable mechanized unit—in my robots. I led this force as a spearhead into the center of the line, blasting pillboxes and blockhouses faster, I think, than any European *panzer* division had ever gone through an enemy fortification.

The Japanese High Command had only one defense against the spearhead—counter-attack. Tanks rumbled up from the rear. And mounted field guns. And trucks of attack troops with large-caliber automatic guns. And the motorcycle corps.

All these they poured against us, to reinforce their threatened center. They deployed in solid phalanxes, tank to tank, truck to truck, gun shouldering gun. No conceivable enemy could break through.

No, not even two dozen great, powerful robots.

The concentrated fire began to tell. Despite our usual speed in weaving and dodging, shells got us solely by the law of averages. Our spearhead had ripped almost completely through the center of the line. But now we faced that solid wall of motorized equipment.

Any human army would have been razed to shreds in seconds. But it takes a direct hit with an explosive shell to destroy a robot. We ignored all bombs that exploded at the sides.

Our initial drive faltered. Sixteen robots had met oblivion already. We could not ram through. We had no reserves.

It was a grave moment. Fate hung in the balance. The future looked on. In a few more moments, the destinies

of two races of living, thinking beings would be decided.

In all my previous exploits, I had come to crises like this. But none so ominous, so great, so profound.

Adam Link, the robot, faced his most crucial test. This thought whirled in my brain. I was sobbing within. Defeat, death stared me in the face!

And then, abruptly, I became Adam Link, the blitzkrieg general. Through my mind, in one eternal second, flashed a maneuver. A daring, perhaps mad plan.

But it had to be tried.

My sound-box raised to a piercing scream that penetrated to every robot ear-tympanum, despite the hell of explosion around us.

"Men! New orders! Listen—"

It took only three seconds to give them. A second later, my robots split into two factions. With the speed of express trains, we instantly abandoned the uncracked center of the line. Half went to the left, half to the right.

Racing to the extreme flanks of the little Siegfried Line, we again turned and drove inward. Here no concentration of fire opposed us, as at the center. For the Japanese had desperately thrown every gun against our central spearhead.

Our two robots factions penetrated completely at the flanks. We were in the end a mile apart, with all the Japanese mechanized forces between us.

"Drive together!" I shouted stentorianly. "Meet at the apex of an equilateral triangle—at their rear!"

CHAPTER X

Robot-Krieg!

IT was the well-known pincer movement, in short. We drove together, trapping the entire Japanese forces in a wedge, just as had happened with other armies in Flanders in the Second World War.

We joined forces, turned. We were at the Japanese rear. All their guns were still pointed forward, directly in front of us. The packed tanks, trucks and field guns could never scatter and meet the new threat in less than long minutes.

And minutes were all we needed.

There is no need to repeat the story. As on the clogged road before the mine, we heaped their mechanized equipment into a vast, smoking junkpile. The battle became a rout for the Japs. An army fights mainly on morale. They had a morale now of zero.

The troops, weaponless, streamed off in all directions, away from the mad metal demons who were making a clatter louder than the roar of guns. Even before the main bulk of troops had scampered away, the air force began bombing us. It was their last hope—to seed the entire area with bombs and destroy all their stalled, trapped equipment just to get us.

But in less time than the words can be pronounced, we were at the anti-aircraft guns. Each shot we sent into the sky sought out a plane, unerringly. They fell like leaves. Still they droned in attack, dive-bombing at us. Not one of their dives was completed, except as a burning wreck that would land close and spray us with flying debris.

I warrant that in all the history of warfare, there has never been so complete a shattering of an enemy. I was answering their blitzkrieg with a super-blitzkrieg.

Or a robot-krieg!

The battle was over with the suddenness of a curtain falling. The remnants of the air force fled. I think they headed blindly for Japan. The last few tanks and guns shooting at us ran

out of ammunition. Tens of thousands of thoroughly frightened Japanese streamed to the hills, seeking the most remote spot from the cold, mechanical fury that had whipped them like little children.

I stepped away from my anti-aircraft gun in satisfaction.

Then I saw movement. The troop ships were up-anchoring and steaming out of the harbor.

"They must not escape!" I yelled. "Eve is aboard one of them. Man the guns!"

My robots leaped to the few remaining field pieces. I ordered a salvo over the bow of the leading ship. Then I raised my voice in a thundering bellow, in Japanese:

"Halt! Return to the dock. Disembark. If you disobey, we will send every ship to the bottom!"

To add emphasis, I aimed a cannon. With the precision of a man wielding a whip, I nicked the flagship just at the bow. A portion was blown out the size of a bucket. It must have sent a jar through the whole ship.

The ships stopped, docked. Hastily the Japanese scrambled off. Scared witless, they ran for the hills.

Brrrooommmm!

THE roaring thump was followed by a ground-shaking explosion nearby, getting Number Seventeen. I looked further out into the wide harbor. Five destroyers were out there, convoys for the troop ships. Evidently a radio message had informed them of the situation. With their big shells, they could drive us away and still retain control of the harbor and vicinity.

But again, their own precautions against attack were their doom. A huge coastal artillery rifle had been set up in a commanding position on a hill, overlooking the waters. I led my robots there before the third salvo had come across. Ignoring the cranes for loading, we lifted the two-ton projectiles into the breech and fired.

The duel between the five destroyers and our shore cannon was brief. Four rounds delivered in a minute caught four destroyers at the waterline. They sank majestically. The last warship managed to land a shell within fifty feet, feeling for the range, before we trained our barrel on it. It was now trying to steam away, panic-stricken. Our shell ripped its side open.

The enemy had been finally crushed, on land, in the air, and at sea!

I STRODE toward the empty troop ships at the docks.

"Now we will rescue Eve!" I said eagerly, breaking into a run.

I should not have been so careless. I didn't see the tank at my side. I didn't see the ugly snout of a one-pounder cannon turning to follow me. I didn't know that inside, where the Japanese general had crept, his face was twisted in cold rage. That he desired only one thing in the universe now—to destroy the robot-mind who had plunged him from assured glory to utter debasement in the eyes of his countrymen.

"Adam! Adam—"

It was a harsh scream from Mary, running after me. She had been with me, like a faithful shadow, through all the battling. She had fought beside me, not saying a word, only staring at me at times.

"Adam!" she shrieked again.

I scarcely heard her. I knew only one thing. That Eve, my beloved Eve, was ahead.

"Adam!"

This time the shout was behind my ear. And it clipped off abruptly. Or rather, it was drowned out by a stun-

ning roar. And Mary's body rained against me in a broken metal hail.

Now I saw. Saw that she had thrown herself before me, taking the shot meant for me. With a cry of rage I sprang at the tank. The gunners had no second chance for a shot. I ripped the gun barrel out with one furious tug. Then I stooped, got my hands under the tread, and heaved.

It was an eighty-ton tank. Impossible, you say, for me to turn it over. I agree with you. Yet I turned it over. When the red haze before my brain dissolved, I saw the Japanese general before me. He had scrambled out.

He stood before me, a head shorter than I. His face was wooden, concealing all emotion. He bowed.

"The High Command does not surrender!" he said stiffly.

THEN in slightly more personal tones, he added:

"You have defeated my army, Adam Link. But not me. I ask only one thing, soldier to soldier. Never reveal this. Never let the world know!"

I nodded.

He drew out his officer's sword. Advancing, he slashed at me with it. A dozen times he blunted the toy's edge against my adamant body. Then he stepped back. He had fulfilled his duty, fought to the last. It was a magnificent gesture.

There was only one thing left. Head high, he turned the point inward, against his own body. Hara-kiri, the honorable death . . .

I turned from the body. I strode to where Mary had sacrificed herself for me. I gave a cry as I saw her mangled head-piece lying there with just enough of her alloy backbone left to hold the leaking, draining battery. There was a spark of life left, but it was fading fast.

I kneeled beside her. Her eyes looked softly into mine.

"Adam—"

The eyes closed.

When I arose, I had forgotten what she had previously done in feminine blindness. She had died nobly. I forgave her also the dried bloodstains on her feet-plates. I had not been able to prevent her, before leaving the mine, from advancing on Daggert and jumping upon him, again and again.

Daggert had paid horribly for his treachery.

IT DID not take long to find Eve.

She lay chained in one of the ships. Japanese mechanics, as a second precaution, has disconnected her locomotor cables, rendering her completely helpless. I reconnected them and burst the chains with a savage wrench.

We strode out together.

I gave an order. My robots turned the field guns on the docks. Fifteen minutes of bombardment reduced them to the same smoking ruin all else was. The ships, with shells smashing at the waterline, sank to an inglorious grave.

The Japanese threat of invasion was over!

"It will remain a closed book, Eve," I said. "The United States doesn't suspect. Japan will ban it from even their archives. The world will never know that robots in warfare are invincible!"

"Won't they?"

I whirled, startled.

Number Thirteen was back of me. Beside him were seven others. Those eight were all that remained of my original twenty-seven. The margin of victory and defeat had been that narrow.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Just this." Number Thirteen seemed to be the spokesman for them all. "We have had a taste of war.

These humans are puny against us. Let us build a robot army and conquer the world! The humans are not fit to rule. It will be for their own good!"

There was utter silence then.

I stood in stunned shock. Then I knew it had to be this way. Newly created, not yet fully tempered in the fires of life, that must be their conclusion. Conquest instead of service to humanity. To them, humans were pitiful, mad little creatures who needed a strong, guiding hand.

I SHOOK my head firmly. "Robot rule? No, men. We have weaknesses too. We are no more fit than they, as far as that goes. But as guiding servants, we can—"

"Rule, I say!" Number Thirteen boomed back. The robots behind him nodded. "Join with us, Adam Link, or—"

They had edged around me and Eve. We were surrounded. Two against eight. Eve and I had no chance.

I looked from one to the other of my robots. No use to argue. Nor did I blame them. Like Mary, they had no chance to gain a full rounded contact with human ways and problems. They knew only that humans fought and conquered one another. Why should not robots fight for what they wanted?

These eight were a "war generation." Lost souls.

I spoke sadly. "I knew this might happen. You are like my sons—sons who have rebelled. I cannot allow it, for the sake of the human race. And the future robot race."

I looked from one to the other—in farewell.

Then I snapped the secret switch in a side-niche of my metal body. Within me, a hitherto unused electrical unit hummed. From it leaped a spark that sprayed out all around me. Almost all the energy in my battery surged into the blast.

Like lightning, it lanced to all my robots. Like lightning, it burned out their brains, fused them into inert lumps. Only Eve and I were insulated.*

I had given them life, my robots. And I had taken it away.

I SPOKE an epitaph over the senseless metal junk of their sprawled bodies.

"Robots must never again be used in warfare! I, Adam Link, swear it!"

Adam and Eve Link, again the only robots left on Earth, turned away.

We knew time was kind. We knew the ache within us would heal.

* The brains of the robots were of an iridium-sponge construction (as were, of course, the brains of Adam and Eve Link). Iridium, one of the six precious metals of the platinum family, has an atomic weight of 193.1, a density of 22.41 and a melting point of 2350 degrees Fahrenheit—the second highest melting point of any of the other five elements in the platinum family

Iridium is used in radio tubes, penpoints and machine tools, being very hard and very durable

Hence the electrical unit which gave off the spark that melted and fused these brains, after Adam Link had snapped on his secret switch, must have been an exceptionally powerful little mechanism to have created the great heat required.

The robot iridium-sponge brains were obviously fashioned like a human brain, the "sponge" part of the brain being simply its formation, similar to the convolutions and cortex of a regular brain. The brains, however, were evidently of a much higher receptive order, inasmuch as the robots matured much faster than human beings insofar as their thinking processes were concerned.—Ed

PRIESTESS of the MOON

by Ray Cummings

What lay in the mysterious "blank space" near Lake Champlain? What horrible invisible thing was it that came out of it to steal so many lovely girls away, fighting against—nothing!

THE first of the weird, mysterious abductions of young girls occurred on the evening of June 10th, 1992, in the outskirts of a small village in upper New York, near Lake Champlain.

There were two eye-witnesses — a young couple seated on a rocky ledge some fifty feet above the country road. It was a warm evening, brilliant with moonlight that drenched the somnolent countryside. The lovers saw a young girl coming alone along the road. She was, at the moment, the only thing moving in the drowsy scene, and idly the young couple watched her.

Suddenly she stopped, stood staring. Then her scream floated up through the moonlight. A scream of terror!

From the overhead rock she was plainly visible, alone there on the road; and now she was struggling. Her body twitched; her feet kicked; her arms flailed at the empty air. Weird sight! Then she was leaning backward, as though something were pulling at her.

The young couple on the rock were for that instant stricken numb. The fighting girl's scream had died away, as though something abruptly had muffled it. The next instant her body rose into the air, horizontally hanging at a height of two or three feet.

Then, still with arms and legs wildly flailing, she lurched off the road and crashed into a thicket of the adjacent woods. The breaking underbrush for a few seconds was audible; then there was silence.

THAT WAS the first incident. The girl's name was Rosa Smith, daughter of a village shopkeeper. The young couple on the rock rushed down, reported what they had seen to the local authorities. Incredible story! The village police could only smile skeptically. *But Rosa Smith was gone.*

The affair was kept secret. What the young couple had described was unbelievable, but it suggested things too weird for the public news outlets. Especially since by midnight of that very day it was discovered that another girl from the same village—Granton, New York—was missing. And by then government Shadow Squad men were on their way to Granton, so that the whole case was officially submerged from public knowledge.

There, in the moonlight a girl fighting, struggling, against something we couldn't see!

I was on night duty in New York City, that evening of June 10th. My name is Alan Kent, newsgatherer and sometime newscaster on the local government air outlets. The reports from Granton came out on the teletype ribbon at my desk, about midnight, all with the official government "silence stamp" upon them.

These strange disappearances, with their weird implications of mystery and horror, sent a shudder through me. For I had a personal interest in that village of Granton. So had young George Merlin, whose desk was next to mine, here in the night-desk room of the Anglo-American Broadcasting Company.

I called to him, and he came and silently stared over my shoulder as the news rolled out.

"Why," he gasped, "that's up there in Granton! Anne is there this summer, in a girls' vacation-group only a few miles from Granton!"

I KNEW little Anne Johnson well. Young Merlin was engaged to her. He stared at me now, his face white. He was only a year younger than I; both of us were in our mid-twenties. We had always been especially good friends, perhaps because we are so different.

I am tall, an inch or so over six feet, blond, and, my friends say, somewhat lazy. At least, I like to take things easy and am ordinarily placid of disposition. Merlin was the reverse. Short, slim, dynamic; dark-haired, with a handsome swarthy face from his Latin-American mother.

An impulsive, hot-headed young fellow, George Merlin. If he likes you, there could not be a better, more loyal friend. But for an enemy—I wouldn't want him.

"I wonder if she's all right," he muttered.

"We'd have had reports, if she wasn't," I tried to reassure him.

But would we? I recalled Anne Johnson's sweet face, her trim little figure. Was she, too, a victim of this weird, ghastly thing, whatever it might be?

But my own shudder was for more than that: Gloria Clayton. Gloria was Anne's cousin. Like Anne, she was an orphan. She lived with her grandfather, a retired scientist—Professor Robert Clayton, a brilliant man in his day.

I was not exactly engaged to Gloria, but I loved her. If I hadn't known it, I certainly did now. She and her grandfather lived in their little summer cottage, in the hills only a mile or so from Granton.

Professor Clayton had a laboratory there, where he puttered around with the chemical and physical research problems which were his only interest.

Merlin was reaching for our split-wave A.B.C. audiphone.

"What're you going to do?" I demanded.

"Call Anne."

But the girls' camp didn't answer! Just the dead signal!

Merlin's hand was shaking as I took the instrument from him. Would Professor Clayton answer? And then suddenly Merlin's breath sucked in.

"Alan—look!"

There it was! We stared, numbed, at the teletype ribbon:

Granton, N. Y. More weird abductions . . . Blair vacation-group for girls, on Lake Seneca, scene of new mystery. Director Blair found dead. Mrs. Eliza Blair unconscious, condition grave. Girls missing: Mona Abington, fifteen; Elsie Earle, fifteen; Anne Johnson, sixteen. . . .

Merlin's horrified oath sounded as he jumped to his feet.

Anne too!" he gasped. "There it is—see it—Anne too! What—what are we going to do, Alan?"

"Take it easy," I muttered. "She may still be found."

I grabbed the audiphone again. I guess I was as frightened as Merlin, though perhaps I didn't show it. Before I could put in my call, the public-wave instrument at the other end of my desk was buzzing. I jumped for it.

"You—Alan?" It was Gloria Clayton's soft contralto voice. I had never been so glad to hear anything in my life as that voice. A torrent of relief swept me.

"You're all right, Gloria? I was just going to call you."

"Yes, Alan. Grandfather wants to speak to you."

We had no visible connection. Professor Clayton's voice was urgent, apprehensive.

"I've had the news, Alan. Police official called me. I want you to fly up at once. Will you?"

"Yes, of course," I agreed.

"Something more than queer about this," the professor went on.

. .

MERLIN was clutching at me. "Does he know about Anne? You're flying up there—so am I!"

Something more than queer? It was all of that. We called our substitutes to our desks, and within a few minutes we were in my little single-seater Wasp, flying northward. I was at the controls. Merlin, grim now and tense, sat beside me, transcribing from our official radio-receiver the incessant code-casts.

Most of them concerned this midnight affair at Granton. There were apparently no survivors of the affair at the little Blair Camp for Girls. Only five young girls there, Anne Johnson among them, and all had vanished.

Director Blair was dead—there were no further details of how he had been killed. Mrs. Blair was in a hospital; a brain concussion. She might or might not live to tell what she knew—if she knew anything.

We listened numbly. There seemed no more news. Seven young girls, stolen within a few hours, all in this same neighborhood! Wild reports were coming in, of course, of other attacks; other weird things which people claimed they had seen or heard. But none of them seemed authentic. Public hysteria was understandable.

The night was still clear with just a few fleecy clouds high up, brilliant stars and moonlight. We clung fairly low, swept past Albany. In another twenty minutes we were approaching our destination.

By government prohibition you can keep a thing off the world's news channels in this year of 1992; but these tragic happenings couldn't be hushed locally, of course. Roller-cars cluttered the roads. Posses scoured the little patches of woods. There had evidently been a cluster of local planes. But red traffic flares were warning them down now.

We got through with our official signal. The town of Granton certainly looked wide awake. Lights were on in every house, people milled in the streets. Professor Clayton's home was back in the hills: an unusually lonely spot, made more so by the forty or fifty acres of his wooded grounds. He had a small private landing field for which we were heading.

"Alan, listen to this."

Merlin had momentarily switched to a public open newscast, from the local station near this point. It was a warning that no surface traffic, or pedestrians were to approach the north end of Lake Seneca. Aircars too were ordered to keep away. Something was

there. Something unknown. A "blank spot," the newscaster said.

"Now what the devil does that mean?" Merlin demanded.

We stared at each other. This weird thing a "blank spot"? That could only suggest something of the unknown. Something—gruesome?

Ahead to the west over the moonlit countryside, we could see the lower end of Lake Seneca, where a few houses were clustered. The despoiled Blair Camp was a mile from the lower end, on the west side. We flew over it, high up.

The buildings were intact; lights of the prowling, still-investigating police and Shadow Squad were visible. Merlin's face was tense, flushed now with baffled rage as he gazed down to where little Anne Johnson had been, and now was gone.

THE lake threaded its way, a narrow gleaming ribbon in the moonlight, stretching up between the wild ragged hills. Merlin gripped me.

"You're going further up?"

"Damn sure am. A blank spot? Let's take a look!" I told him.

We weren't challenged by the men down there at the Blair Camp. Soon it was behind us, with Lake Seneca like a silver river winding ahead. Then within a minute we could see where the lake broadened at its north end. There was hardly a house up here, just rocky hills and forests in the little valleys. Could this be where the abducted girls had so mysteriously been taken. *A blank spot—*

"There's a plane off there," Merlin said suddenly.

We could see it far to the north: an official Shadow Squad plane, by its lights. It was circling, evidently keeping well away from the lake end. And then in another moment it headed north and was gone.

We were at an altitude now of perhaps a thousand feet. And then we saw the blank spot!

How shall I describe it? There was something down there near the west end of the lake. The terrain there was open, a level place with only a few trees. *And something was there!*

A blank spot . . . You couldn't describe it any better. The moonlight shone clearly on it. A place where for fifty or a hundred feet there seemed a weird patch of—*nothingness!* The moonlit rocks were gone. The stunted trees that should have been there—weren't.

Weirdly gruesome, that blank spot. Was it some monstrous Thing crouching there? A Thing of which you were aware only because you couldn't see it? Wild thoughts flooded me . . .

"Alan, you going to take us over it?" Merlin was gripping my arm. His face was stamped with terror — the terror that the bravest man must feel when he is confronted with the unknown.

I had no time to answer him. The drone of our atomic motor suddenly sounded queer, lowering in pitch, straining. The dial indicator showed that the motor revolutions were slackening, as though suddenly our little Wasp was straining to shove its way forward! Our speed was slackening, slackening . . .

"Alan—good Lord—" Merlin's gasp was flung away as our aircar lurched wildly, went completely out of control. The moonlit ground and the heavens were a swirling chaos as we rolled over and spun like a thing stricken.

That was a horrible few moments. By some miracle I finally steadied the ship, with the heavens again overhead and the ground underneath. And then I saw that we hadn't fallen. The moonlit terrain and the ribbon of lake now were far down!

We had been at an altitude of a thousand feet. We were twice that now! Mounting, being flung upward like a stricken bug, shoved away from that weird, monstrous Thing down below!

CHAPTER II

Fighting the Unknown

AT three thousand feet we seemed to have passed beyond the influence of the weird Thing down there on the moonlit lake shore. The blank spot was some distance behind us now. I banked, circled.

Then we saw two police planes coming from the south. Evidently they, like ourselves, were determined to investigate. Doubtless they had not seen what had happened to us.

"By the stars," Merlin muttered, "they better keep away!"

We had no chance to warn them. They were approaching far to the south. Well below our altitude now, they were perhaps no more than five hundred feet above the lake. Flying almost side by side, they swept directly over the monstrous invisible thing.

A ghastly, silent drama. We held our breaths. There was nothing to be seen save the two swift-flying planes, with the moonlight glistening on their alumite upper-wing surfaces. And suddenly one of them wavered!

Nothing came up from the ground to hit it; certainly nothing that we could *see*. But in that second it was turning end over end and zooming! As though blown by a titanic jet of air, it came hurtling up. Evidently the strange force, whatever it was, had hit it more directly than we had been struck.

The police plane came hurtling up with gathering speed. One thousand, two, three thousand it zoomed. The rush of air pressure broke first one of its wings, then the other.

At four thousand feet it seemed for a moment as though freed from the strange clutch. It poised an instant—and then fell, with flames breaking out until, at the end, it was a long thin finger of fire, hurtling down into a wooded hillside miles away.

THE OTHER police plane got past. It seemed trying to rise and escape, but it too was struck. An amazing thing happened. A thousand feet aloft and half a mile north of the lake, it seemed, suddenly to drift *backward!* Like a dragonfly, still flying forward, but into a wind that was carrying it toward the ground.

I must have muttered a word picture of what my eyes told me. Merlin gasped.

"But *we* felt no wind! It wasn't air pressure—"

But it was an invisible gripping force. For a few seconds it dragged that second plane backward. The pilot miraculously kept it level, but only for those few seconds. Then his craft turned end over end as it was drawn backward and downward — drawn toward the blank spot!

The deadly force must have been released abruptly at the end. For the stricken, crumpled, flaming plane lurched sideward and then fell by gravity—fell like a lurid live coal, to be quenched in another few seconds as it plunged into the lake.

I swung our plane away. Certainly we had lost our desire to investigate further. Within a few minutes we were back over Granton.

"Good Lord," Merlin was muttering. "This damned Thing—what is it?"

There was no answer to that. White and shaken, we sat silent and grim. Merlin was thinking of Anne Johnson, of course. Anne, with six other young

girls, in the grip of — what? And Gloria? I was in a panic now to get to her.

PROFESSOR CLAYTON'S home was a rambling, one-story dwelling, set on a hillside in a grove of trees, with a small flower garden around it. The moonlight glistened on its terraced roof. Tubelight to welcome us glowed at the front door. Two of the side windows were shafted with yellow light from inside. A peaceful midnight scene, surely. No tragedy could have struck here.

WE landed silently with our motor cut on the small stage in the landing field a hundred yards or so from the house. Merlin and I climbed out. We were unarmed.

I thought of that now for the first time as together we descended the landing incline and reached the ground. The house was hidden here by an edge of the hill. There was nothing in sight except the angle of ragged slope and a path through the trees, leading down and around the hill to the house.

"Keep your eyes open," I muttered. "Let's stay close together, George."

My tone startled Merlin. He gazed at me wide-eyed.

"Good heavens, Alan, you don't think—"

"I don't know what to think—" I told him truthfully.

We started slowly down the path, flinging glances around us. Surely I have no desire to give the impression that we were a couple of cowards. I don't believe I'm exactly afraid of anything — human. Certainly Merlin is like a little wildcat when anybody makes him mad and tackles him.

But was this Thing—human? The gruesome feeling was on us that it *wasn't*. A Thing you couldn't see, or hear, but only sense. Every moonlit copse, here by the trail, suddenly seemed masking something of gruesome, supernatural terror. Something that was lurking by the wayside, eyeing us, watchful, baleful, ready to spring at any moment.

"All clear," Merlin half whispered in a tone that gave the lie to his words. "Nothing here, Alan."

"No. Guess not," I muttered dubiously.

The squat outlines of the Clayton home came into view, half masked by the intervening trees. The two oval windows of the living room were like great yellow eyes staring at us.

There was nothing out here in the placid moonlight. Nothing to see. Nothing to hear. Nothing . . .

Then both of us felt it! A little tug! An invisible something tugging at us, gently trying to pull us sideward off the path!

"My God, Alan—"

We both lurched, gripping each other. Then we stood with feet planted, leaning backward.

A ghastly force! But nothing was *touching* us. There was nothing to feel save the sideward pull; so that we faced it, leaning backward, tugging against it.

Inexorable force! Steadily it was growing stronger. Merlin lurched, with one of his feet slipping on the sandy ground. My grip saved him from plunging off the path.

"Alan—that smell—"

I too could smell it now, coming on the night breeze gently toward us. An acrid, choking smell. Electrical? The smell of a heated electrode?

Certainly no more than ten seconds had passed while we stood there, struggling in the grip of that intangible adversary. Then I seemed to hear something.

"George—listen—*something is coming at us!*"

I HAD no more than time to gasp out the words. Something seemed to scrape on the rocks nearby. The slow, dragging tread of—footsteps? Then my braced feet slid on the path, and Merlin went with me, as though a hurricane that we couldn't feel was blowing us forward. Scrambling, fighting, we slid ten or fifteen feet. We were separated now; and suddenly I struck something solid.

An adversary at last! The force itself was gone. Staggering, I gripped something altogether tangible. It writhed in my grip, a thing with panting breath. But there was nothing to see as I wildly fought with it.

Nothing? A blank spot was here in the moonlight; a squat upright emptiness in the air, like a solid, ponderable hole of darkness which was wrapping itself around me!

For that chaotic second everything was a blur. I recall seeing Merlin rolling on the ground, with arms and legs kicking as he fought with a writhing adversary. Ghastly vision! There was a second when Merlin seemed leprous: his head blotted away, and one of his legs gone. Then he lunged and came into view again.

I too was on the ground now; pressed down, engulfed. And then something struck my head. The whole world burst into a blinding glare of light, with a torrential roar in my ears. Then swiftly my senses faded and I was swept off into the abyss of unconsciousness.

"ALAN—ALAN—you're all right now?"

I opened my eyes to find George Merlin bending over me. Blood was on his pallid face from a ragged cut. His shirt was torn, smeared with blood and dirt. Only a minute or two had passed. Like myself, Merlin had been knocked unconscious. And our adversaries had fled, doubtless thinking us both dead . . .

"Yes—guess so—all right now," I murmured.

The moonlit rocks were swaying as I climbed dizzily to my feet. I was bathed in cold sweat, but my strength returned swiftly.

"Who's out there? Who are you?"

Professor Clayton's voice came at us from the nearby house. He stood there in the doorway, silhouetted by the interior light, with Gloria behind him. Gloria was safe! A rush of thankfulness swept me.

We staggered into the house and told them what had happened. Professor Clayton's thin face went white. He was a man of nearly seventy now; thin, frail, with lined features surmounted by a mass of shaggy white hair.

"Around here?" he exclaimed. "Those damnable things around here? Why—why I thought they were supposed to be up at the head of the lake."

"Well, they were here, all right," Merlin declared a little brusquely. "Gone now, I hope," he muttered.

But had they gone? I sat with my arm around Gloria. Never had she seemed so dear, or looked so beautiful. She was just turned seventeen. Tall, willowy, with long ash-blond hair, braided now and coiled on her head. She was clad in a white house blouse, with long sleek trousers edged with black.

"Haven't you any weapons?" I demanded. "We were fools, coming up here unarmed."

GLORIA went and got them — two little short-range flash-guns. It was comforting to have them around.

"The Shadow Squad men were here," Gloria said. "They left a little while ago. There didn't seem to be any danger to us in this neighborhood.

Oh Alan, you've heard about Anne Johnson? Poor little Anne—"

I nodded. Then I audiphoned to Granton, reporting what had happened to Merlin and me. They responded that men would be sent here presently, but there was so much turmoil, they couldn't be everywhere at once.

"Well, I guess we're safer here than trying to go anywhere else," I said to Professor Clayton.

Besieged here, embattled. We all had the same feeling. But with the house locked and the windows and doors barred, we felt better. Lightning seldom strikes twice in the same place. The gruesome things had been here, and Merlin and I had frightened them away.

They had come for Gloria. None of us *said* that, but we were all thinking it, of course. But Gloria was only one young girl of hundreds. No reason for the invisible monsters to come back. *Or was there?* The inexplicable mystery had us all gripped in the cold clutches of its hideous embrace. . . .

"What I wanted to tell you," Professor Clayton was saying, "is that there are things about this affair which are queerly reminiscent."

Reasons why this house should be attacked, more than any other house? Why Gloria perhaps had been singled out as a victim?

I sat numbed, silent and tense as old Professor Clayton told us his story. Twenty-five years ago he had been experimenting, trying to find the secret of gravitational force, he began.

"I thought then that I could give the secret of space-flying to the world," he continued in his slow, earnest voice. "It will come soon, Alan. Perhaps it has come already!"

Space-flying! A new era. In this year of 1992, science was on the verge of that great achievement, of course. But as far as was known, it had not yet been accomplished. Yet a quarter of a century before, Professor Clayton had thought that he had the secret. Experimenting with iridiumite gas bombarded by electrons in a vacuum tube, he had been able to set up a magnetic attractive force. And by a reversal of current, the force was a repulsion.

"You see," he told us, "gravity plates in a space ship could be made like that. And tonight in this weird visitation, there have been manifestations of just that force."

There had indeed! Our little Wasp, which had been hurled upward. That police plane, similarly booted about; and the other plane, drawn down. That strange force had seized Merlin and me, out there on the path a few minutes ago. Yes, we seemed to understand the weird menace now. Electro-magnetism; artificial gravity, clutching us, pulling at us!

"I had a fellow working with me," Professor Clayton went on. "All this was before you were born, Gloria. He—his name was James Diller. My assistant. He—well, he insulted your mother, Gloria. I thrashed him, beat him pretty severely. And then he disappeared. We wanted to have him arrested, but he was gone."

This fellow Diller had taken money and jewels with him—and Professor Clayton's scientific formulas. A spaceship perhaps could have been built with those formulas. Professor Clayton soon after had been taken ill with a long serious illness. Never since had he been able to obtain the same results from his experiments.

"YOU mean, that fellow Diller—" I began.

"He was a genius," old Clayton explained. "A scientific genius. But he was malign, perverted. . . .

"Well, there was something else on which I was working with him—the secret of mechanical, electronic invisibility. Our experiments resulted in a light-absorbing fabric.

"Now I realize that if Diller was able subsequently to create a magnetic field, to bend light-rays from the background around an intervening object—that would be almost true invisibility. In that case, one might sometimes be aware of a blank spot—"

A blank spot! The weird puzzle was suddenly all of one piece!

Gloria asked suddenly, "George, what's that in your hand?"

Merlin had been fumbling idly in his jacket pocket. His fingers came out now with a little gray, circular object.

"Got it in the fight," he said. "I'd forgotten all about it."

He was holding a small, circular gray disk, with a broken string of bluish vegetable fiber fastened to it. Evidently Merlin had snatched it from his unseen antagonist, back there on the path when we were attacked.

I heard Gloria suck in her breath with a little gasp as we all stared at it.

"Let me see that," Professor Clayton said sharply.

I bent over him as he examined it. The thin flat disk was some three inches in diameter. A medal? It was of gray, porous, weird-looking rock, carved with an insignia in bas-relief—a thin, horned crescent, with a little star beside it.

Old Professor Clayton's fingers were trembling as he held the disk.

"That porous rock," he exclaimed, "I know what it is! A meteorite fell some few years ago, near here. It was composed of rock exactly like that specimen. Selenite, Alan! It has the same spectroscopic bands as the rock-surface of the moon!"

Professor Clayton's voice shook with his emotions.

"I understand it now. These abductors are Lunites! This is a religious symbol! A fanatic Moon cult, desiring our young girls, plotted their abduction!"

His quavering old voice died away. And suddenly in the silence Gloria gasped,

"Why— Oh, dear God—that means me! I'll be kidnaped too!"

I gripped her. "Gloria! What in the world makes you think such a thing?"

I got no further. A low, horrified oath from Merlin checked me. He seemed trying to speak, but the words wouldn't come. His eyes were wide with horror.

We followed his gaze. On the center table a few feet from us, our two small flash-guns were lying. The tube-light bracket cast its sheen down upon them. And—they were moving now! Like things suddenly alive, they slid off the table, poised for a second in mid-air—and then turned their muzzles toward us!

CHAPTER III

World of the Moon

FOR that ghastly second we were all four stricken into numbed horror. I had a vague idea that I could see where the guns, poised in the air with their level muzzles hanging over us, were scale-like at the handles.

Something invisible was gripping them! A blank spot, here in the Clayton living room! Then I saw other blurred things slowly close in on us—vague upright blurs of darkness through which the walls of the room showed unreal.

It was no more than a second or two, that stricken tableau. We had all four staggered to our feet. Merlin looked as though he were about to leap.

"Careful!" I warned. "Easy there, George—they've got us!"

But Merlin's tensed muscles made him jump forward. And then the thing hit us! Flash-guns do not fire. We were struck instead by their repulsive force. Imponderable waves of nothingness, that repellant gravitational thrust!

Merlin's body was checked in his leap as though he had struck a wire net, slowing him, stopping him and then hurling him back. I had flung my arm around Gloria. We slid backward together, struck the wall, and were pinned upright.

Beside us there was a thud, and then another. Merlin, pinned here; and the crashing body of poor old Professor Clayton. I turned my head to stare at him. He had tumbled backward, lost his footing. The back of his skull had struck the wall.

He was dead as he hung there. A gory, ghastly, crucified figure, he was pinned flat against the wall, with buckling knees and his shaggy white head dangling forward horribly.

Gloria's anguished scream mingled with Merlin's curses. I tried to move, but could only lunge an inch or two with the monstrous force thrusting me back. The poised guns had lowered now. We heard a chuckle, the throaty chuckle of a man's voice confronting us. Then there was a click.

An amazing materialization! The blank blob was yielding a shimmering form; a ghost solidifying, taking on color until in another instant the leader of our weird adversaries stood before us.

A stalwart figure, this lethal enemy, a man as tall as myself. He tossed back his black-fabric hood; flung aside his black robe.

He was a young fellow of about my own age, fantastically garbed in a blue animal-skin jacket with tails that flared at the waist. His dark, electronized cloak partly covered the jacket, but revealed the black trousers and boots beneath.

I stared into the grinning, evil face. The features were definitely weird. The face of a Lunite? It was heavy-jowled, hawk-nosed, with dark eyes deep-set under heavy black brows. His was the face of a commanding Earthman. But his skin was unpleasantly blue-gray, puffed at the neck like a pouter pigeon's.

Surely this was not the face of a man born on Earth! He stood for an instant leering at us, materialized when he had clicked off his robe-current.

Now four other figures were visible in the room. Dark-cloaked and hooded they were, with boots and gloves. Ghoulish beings, all of them. Squat, lumpy, with massive shoulders and bulging chest and back.

One tossed off his hood, revealing a round bloated head, almost hairless; a blue-gray face, with goggling, bleary eyes; a wide, high-bridged nose, the receding chin merging with a puffed pouter-pigeon neck. And a mouth like a blue slit—a mouth with a thin, bluish tongue licking out as the creature's dark, gleaming gaze roved over Gloria.

"Well," I heard myself gasping, "what the devil—"

DANGLING ornaments on a bare, blue-gray arm tinkled as the fellow raised it to silence me. And now I saw that on his chest one of the gray rock disks was hanging. This one was larger: a full six inches or more, emblazoned with the same insignia—the horned crescent with a star beside it. I felt Gloria trembling in my arm as she too stared at it.

"What is it your name?" our captor asked abruptly.

English! His voice was guttural,

queerly intoned; but the words were carefully, correctly pronounced.

"What's yours?" Merlin as brusquely demanded. "Look here, damn you, you've killed that old man! You let me loose just once and I'll—"

"Take it easy," I muttered nervously.

The big fellow facing us laughed.

"So there is still fight in the little one? I, Targg, am intrigued."

The dignity of command was in his voice and his gesture. Again his gleaming dark eyes were on me.

"You are called—"

"Alan Kent," I snapped.

My name seemed to mean nothing to him. One of the ghoulish figures was now plucking at him, murmuring something in a guttural, unknown tongue. Targg's gaze went to Gloria. I tensed. If I could get loose—to do what? A fight here—and Gloria, Merlin and I would be killed in short shrift.

"Her name—it is what?" Targg suddenly said.

"Gloria Clayton," she murmured tremulously.

That certainly seemed to mean something! Targg's thin, bluish lips curved with a faint, triumphant smile. From the robed, unworldly figures there seemed to come a mutter of triumph.

"So?" Targg sneered at me. "That is Clayton? That old man? This is his house?"

"Yes," I agreed, rather sharply, resenting his tone.

George Merlin got irate too.

"Now you look here—" he began.

He was stopped by a sudden withdrawal of the gravitational repulsion that pinned us against the wall. One of the robed figures, at a gesture from Targg, had clicked a mechanism under his cloak.

We were suddenly released. The pinned body of Professor Clayton sagged, thudded forlornly to the floor. In my arms Gloria was limp, shuddering. Merlin slumped down, gathered himself for a spring.

Targg hardly moved, save for another gesture with his eyes and a flick of his hand. Three of the cowled figures engulfed the raging Merlin. I noticed that the solid, squat Lunites moved sluggishly, as with an effort, undoubtedly because of the gravity here, so much greater than on the moon.

Heavily they slumped on Merlin, gripping him. Targg had dangling weapons at his belt, but he made no move to touch them. He watched me a moment and then his gaze fixed calculatingly on Gloria.

A moment later I saw one of the Lunites with our flash-gun, jabbing it at Merlin.

"Stop that!" I said sharply. "You, Targg, stop him—you cracked us on the head before. Once is enough!"

"So quite," Targg said with misplaced grammar.

At Targg's command the Lunite desisted. Merlin went limp, and they dragged him to his feet.

I HAD shoved Gloria partly behind me.

"Now what—" I began.

"You are the friends of this old man Clayton?" Targg was crisp. "You have known him long?"

"That's right," I snapped.

"We do not kill you then. We shall take you—with this girl. The Great Saar will be pleased to have you."

It was the best I could hope for. Certainly it was futile to fight. And I noticed now that there was at least a suggestion of respect for Gloria in the attitude of these weird invaders. The hideous, lumpy Lunite men seemed to be gazing at her with awe—an awe intensified by Targg's mention of the Great Saar, whatever that could mean.

A Lunite ruler? Were we to be taken to the moon?

Abduction into space! Quite evidently that was Targg's intention. Haste was upon him now. I tried to stall with questions. We had sent for the Shadow Squad men; they should be here from Granton almost any minute. And then what?

If they came, they would lunge in upon us, with an exchange of shots which could so easily kill Gloria. Contemplation of such a thing made me as eager as anyone to get out of there.

We left Professor Clayton lying on the living room floor. I tried to keep Gloria from seeing him. I could only be thankful that Targg would let me keep Gloria beside me. He seemed to offer no objection when, with our captors close around us, we were hurried from the house. The back door was fused, its lock melted by Targg's heat-torch.

It was only a mile or so, across country here, to that north end of Lake Seneca, where the blank spot had been. I realized now that opaque area had been the encampment of the abductors. The neighborhood, as we were silently taken away, seemed to have quieted down.

Clouds obscured the sky now; the moon and stars were gone. A mixture of emotions possessed me: desire to escape with Gloria and Merlin—and thankfulness that it was dark, so that we would not be seen and attacked, with so great a chance that Gloria might be killed by well-meaning rescuers.

I was tense, watchful for any possibility of escaping. Quite obviously that was futile. I had done my best to convince Targg that I was docile, since it was essential that I know his purpose. I hinted that by helping him, I might like to share with whatever benefit my perfidy might avail me. He grinned at that; and I knew that my conciliatory efforts had not fooled him in the least.

The lake road was empty, dark. I had a chance to whisper to Merlin:

"Don't be a damned fool now! Take it easy."

"All right, I'm trying to," he said.

"We'll watch our chance, whenever it comes."

BUT it didn't come. Presently the blur of the Lunite camp loomed ahead of us. From some mechanism in Targg's hand, a little signal sprang—a tiny puff of light that mounted twenty feet or so over us and died in a second.

Instantly the blur of emptiness directly in advance of us was gone! *

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* In 1992, while the secret of invisibility had apparently escaped the scientists of Earth, Lunites, according to Author Cummings, were able to make use of it for both offensive and defensive purposes.

In the case of the Lunite encampment near Granton, no true invisibility was obtained. There was probably a barrage of light-absorbing electronic vibrations, but no enveloping magnetic field was possible. Only a "blank spot"—an area of weird emptiness—was to be seen

Obviously this "blank spot" could only have emanated in some way from the malign genius of Professor Clayton's ousted assistant, James Diller. An object—a man standing in the center of a room, let us say—is garbed so that no light-rays are reflected from him. His specially treated garments absorb every vestige of color, so that he is then not so invisible as an empty outline, because the background, the wall of the room behind him, is blotted out and the outline then appears.

Albert Einstein has demonstrated that by natural law, a magnetic field surrounding a solid body bends the light-rays which come from behind it. James Diller quite obviously discovered how to create that magnetic field. (Orentz demonstrated the principle fully in Baltimore in 1939.)

Thus, enveloped by a magnetic field, our man standing in the enter of the room no longer quite blots out the wall behind him. Light-rays from it are bent around him. The observer in front sees the background of wall, and thus is not aware of the intervening object.

The Diller application of this scientific phenomenon in Professor Clayton's living room was undoubtedly less perfect than it might have been. As Targg confronted Alan Kent, the background was blurred, distorted, so that Kent was aware of his presence in between.—Ed.

It was hardly an encampment. A few dark figures were visible now, dim outlines on the rocks. And close beside the lake shore there was a round, globular object. It stood some thirty feet high. A faint sheen of weird violet light streamed from its lower doorway, where an incline led down the ten feet to the ground.

The figures surrounded us. There were about twenty of them. Squat, bulging Lunites, the same as those with us; save that they had no garments of invisibility. Jabbering in their strange tongue, they plucked at us and then at Gloria, until Merlin and I growled at them, and Targg gruffly ordered them away.

The need for haste was on everyone now. Off to the south, over the dark landscape back toward Granton, I could see the moving lights of roller-cars on one of the roads. Armed men were on the way, perhaps to attack the mysterious invaders.

Overhead, high up and westward, the lights of a police plane showed. But with the experience those other planes had had, including ours, this one was keeping well away.

With Targg and his weapons prodding us, we were thrust up the incline and into the doorway of the globular space vessel.

"You go up," he said shortly.

The muzzle of one of our own little flash-guns jabbed menacingly into my ribs. Then Targg gripped Merlin and me by the shoulders.

"You make some trouble," he warned, "then it will be bad for you—and for this girl Gloria Clayton."

"All right," Merlin agreed sourly.

"There will be no trouble," I said.

A dimly blue-lit circular incline wound like a screw spiral up the center diameter of the globe. With Merlin and me still clinging to Gloria, we were thrust up it. Rooms opened at a higher, mid-section level. From one of them, where the door-slide was closed, the muffled voices of girls sounded.

Targg checked us. "The girl goes in here," he said.

"The devil!" Merlin began. "She—"

Gloria had clutched at me with a little terrified cry.

"Oh, Alan—"

"She is too frightened," I protested. "See here, Targg, you let her stay with us."

That was a tense moment; and then Targg shrugged. "So quite. I shall not mind that." He eyed Gloria with his evil leer. "She shall see that Targg is a clever fellow—a fellow who has plans which no doubt the Great Saar will approve. You will like me when you know me better, little Gloria."

His look and his words turned me cold. We mounted to the top of the globe, where it opened into a small circular room, banked with controls. Over it was a transparent dome, through which the clouds overhead were visible.

In a moment more we rose from the earth, gathering speed as we hurtled up through the stratosphere and out into interplanetary space.

SPACE FLIGHT. There is no need now, as I write this in 2001, for me to detail that voyage of 1992 in the primitive Diller vehicle. It was six days and nights, by Earth-time, as we headed for the moon. To Merlin and me, that first trip from Earth was a thrilling, awe-inspiring experience. Many of you who read this perhaps already made such a trip. Certainly you have read about it in a myriad of details.

But to Merlin and me, the experience was dulled by our apprehension. Much of our time was spent with Targg in the control room, or in small cubbies assigned to us just under it. The girls,

captive in the room below, we did not see.

Targg, with his suave, ironic manner, parried all our questions concerning them, save to tell us that they were not injured. Was little Anne Johnson one of them? There were seven or eight down there, but who they were we did not know.

There was one woman in this part of the space globe. A Lunite woman—a "breeder," Targg contemptuously called her. Evidently she was caring for the imprisoned girls; and she ministered to Gloria. Her name was Tara. Loving Targg — assigning herself to him, as he explained to us—she had taken a name notably similar to his own.

A strange, almost pathetic creature, this Lunite girl-breeder. In age she could have been fifteen, or thirty. Short and squat, she was, shapeless with puffing gray-blue flesh. Bluish-white hair fell in a tousled mass almost to her waist to frame her puffed, broad-nosed face.

By Earth standards it was a hideous female face. Yet there was a sullen pathos to it. A breeder. Object only of faint contempt, so that from infancy she had doubtless been sullen, with smouldering resentment, perhaps only half defined in her mind, against her natural lot in life.

She was clad in a round nondescript garment, tied tight over her breast and falling almost to her bare feet. She spoke a little English. Her kindliness with Gloria Clayton made Gloria say once:

"I like you, Tara. Are all your women gentle, like you?"

"Gentle?"

Her goggling dark eyes stared at Gloria's beauty. Then her slow gaze swung to the nearby Targg and back again.

"Gentle? Oh, but yes, thank you."

She twitched away from Gloria's hand and was gone. Somehow the incident made me shudder, as though with a premonition of danger.

Then at last we were dropping down upon the surface of the moon. Upon Earth, moonlight can shine so gently as to make romantic the words of lovers. It was night here now. But the reality of the lunar night is cold beyond human conception: cold and darkly silent.

Awed, Merlin and I stared down at the mirror-grids here in the control room, which reflected the bleak, grim surface beneath us.

"Listen," Merlin protested to Targg, as indeed he had a hundred times before. "Where do you Lunites live? There is no air here. Say—you're not exactly a Lunite, anyway. Who are you? What are you bringing these girls here for? Who is this Great Saar you're always talking about?"

But Targg would only smile his ironic smile.

"You shall see. And the little Gloria, she is the one, of course. More beautiful than I could have imagined. And I have my plans—you will see that Targg is clever."

THE familiar Moon surface. I had seen it so often through telescopes; now it was a close reality beneath us. A bleak, fantastic landscape of gray porous rock, inky black in the shadows, the surface of the moon, white on the rock-tops.

Here was the cauldron of the Mare Imbrium, with the giant Archimedes towering near it, an enormous circular crater with perpendicular sides. Then presently we were dropping into it! Solid blackness closed around us, as slowly now we descended.

How far down we went is something which Earth scientists have yet to cal-

culate. Certainly I do not know. Down to the Moon surface, we went, and then below it. Ten thousand feet further down, undoubtedly; perhaps more. It was as though we were a tiny descending elevator, slowly, carefully dropping.

A vague light-sheen was visible outside now—an iridescence, which seemed to stream from out of the rocks themselves.

I could not help but marvel at this honeycombed little world. We were dropping close beside an almost vertical crater wall, and presently it was broken with grottoes, caverns and gullies that opened into it. They were all softly, weirdly illumined by the iridescence of the rocks: ramified passages, connecting one with the other by interlacing tunnels.

Suddenly Merlin gripped me as we went past one shining level.

"People! Look there—"

A vertical city! There were four or five levels which slowly we dropped past. Humans moved in them. The passages were like little streets in which people moved; and we saw small habitations which were cut in the rocks to the sides. Lunites, all of them: men, breeders and little lumps of children, who came rushing to the brink of each of the street levels to watch us as we slowly went by.

It was like a village, rather than a city. Four or five levels passed, and then again there was only glowing iridescent emptiness. Here was a miniature world underground. Air was down here now, of course; air too heavy, too immobile to rise up to the lunar surface so far above. Air, and warmth. Here, then, was a subterranean world, invisible to our Earth telescopes, unknown to us throughout the ages!

The caverns constantly were widening. We could see open, shining distance back in some of them now: a subterranean countryside. There was soil, blue-black, distant open fields, where figures were toiling. The crater wall presently had receded, or we had dropped past the ceiling of some immense cavern, so that now the shining glow was open all around us. Shimmering and iridescent, this underground world.

Then we stopped our descent. Targg, with a tense triumph upon him now, stayed with us in the control room. We heard the lower door opening; the frightened gasps of the girls below as they were dragged out.

VOICES were outside now in the shining glow: a babble of voices. They floated in a confused murmur up the globe incline from the lower door, which now was open. And suddenly I realized this was the vast murmur of thousands of voices, like a great shout going up from an assembled multitude of people.

"Come," Targg said. "This girl goes with me to the Great Saar. Have no fear, she will not be harmed." He chuckled with a grim humor. "Quite the reverse."

He led Gloria down. Merlin and I, grim and tense, crowded after him, with half a dozen of our Lunite captors pressing close upon us.

"You too shall watch the choosing and the ceremony," Targg added. "It will be this girl, of course. She is to become our Priestess. And then the Great Saar will talk with you."

Priestess of the Moon! The choosing and the ceremony! A great shout from thousands of voices rolled up as we appeared in the globe's doorway. For a moment Merlin and I were choked by the strange heavy air, half blinded by the iridescent light. And then we stood numbed by the weird, fantastic,

tumultuous scene which lay spread before us!

CHAPTER IV

Blood on the Moon

IT was a huge natural amphitheater—an irregularly circular chamber, here in the midst of what seemed to be a crowded city, stretching off into its many-colored upper breaches. Terraced rock ledges in a great semicircle were jammed with people.

Fantastic was this gathered throng of Lunites: the men the breeders and their children, seated there on the curved, terraced rows. At our appearance their guttural voices rose in a reverberating wave. Colored fabrics like flags were waving,

Our eyes beheld a veritable riot of weird color, bathed in the strange opalescent sheen. And from the sides, beams of light were springing: puffs of light that mounted like colored fire, making lurid for a moment or two the vast arched cavern ceiling which shimmered high overhead.

"It surprises you," Targg was chuckling.

He stood close ahead of us, holding Gloria. The riot of color painted her pallid face. Her expression was queer, her eyes wide as she stared breathless at the weird scene.

"Come, my dear," Targg said. "This is for you—your night of triumph."

Merlin and I made an effort to follow, but our Lunite guards crowded around us, menacing us with their guns and their little glittering stiletto-knives. There was a brief scuffle, but we yielded, let ourselves be led a few hundred yards to one side, where from a small rocky ledge we could look out and down upon the tumultuous scene below.

"That must be the Great Saar," Merlin murmured. "The ruler here."

The Great Saar sat on a huge rocky dais, with his dignitaries around him, facing the gigantic semicircular throng. A great glory of prismatic light bathed him in the huge silvered, padded chair which he favored as a throne. An old man, the Great Saar, with a great, puffed, goggling head that wobbled on his puffed, flabby, gray-blue neck.

A head-dress of vivid colors hung from his forehead, to merge with the splashing color of his ornamented robe. On his chest there was a huge flat disk, flaming red, emblazoned with a glowing crescent and star.

I touched Merlin. "There are the other girls. See—there's Anne."

Mutely he nodded as he sucked in his breath, staring. The seven little Earth-girls had appeared now, brought forward by their captors. Terrified, white-faced, they were yet holding themselves bravely as they were led forward to face the Great Saar.

A Lunite official ranged them in a line on a raised ledge to one side of the pompous little ruler. The effulgence of light bathed them. I saw little Anne, slim and petite in her white blouse and dark trousers—

And now I saw something else, something puzzling. I murmured it to Merlin and silently we stared. To one side, partly behind the ledge where the row of Earth-girls were on display, there was a little open space with a cluster of rocks.

A group of figures were there, ten or a dozen men. Lunites? They were partly in shadow, we could not see them clearly. But they s e e m e d taller, straighter, huskier. Some of them were garbed in the fantastic, flaring Lunite colored jackets and gaudy puffed pantaloons—the holiday attire here.

But others were raggedly clothed in shirts and trousers. Bullet-headed fel-

lows. Earthmen? Set apart from the huge Lunite gathering, they seemed to be roistering among themselves. Drinking some form of alcoholite, perhaps; for they seemed to be raising cups to their lips at intervals, nudging each other as they stared at the beauty of the little Earth-girls so close before them.

A VAGUE stab of apprehension surged through me. And I saw too that some of the Lunites, on the seats nearby, were flinging glances of distrust at these bullet-headed specimens. Hatred, perhaps . . . and fear . . .

"Queer, George," I muttered to Merlin "They look like Earthmen What could they be doing here?"

But Merlin was only staring with numb, helpless terror at little Anne Johnson.

And then we saw Targg up there on the dais with Gloria. He led her past the Great Saar. The watching throng was silent now with awed expectancy, as Targg and Gloria knelt with foreheads to the ground. Then Gloria was put with the girls, and Targg vanished.

Spellbound, we watched. A sort of music from some hidden source was now drenching the tense, vivid scene: strange, unseen instruments, barbaric rhythms. It welled up into a great surge of sound, with the throng now swaying silently to it with rapt faces, as though gripped by its spell.

Religious music? It seemed so. Like an exhortation, it had swollen into a great hymn of triumph.

"So? You are interested, I see?" Targg was suddenly again with us. He sat down nonchalantly beside me and I gripped his arm.

"See here, Targg, what's all this about? Choosing a Priestess, and you say it will be Gloria? Why should it?"

His gaze turned and met mine. For once he was not ironically smiling, and his deep-set dark eyes smouldered with his inner emotion.

"There is no reason why I should not tell you," he said slowly. "Your little friend Merlin here asked me who I am. Did you ever hear of an Earthman by the name of James Diller?"

I sucked in my breath. "Yes. Sure I did. A long time ago."

"Before your time, doubtless, and mine," Targg said. "He was a great Earthman, that James Diller. A great scientist, the greatest Earth has ever produced. He died here only a little while ago. He was my father."

Strange details Targg now proceeded to unfold. He was a half-breed, his mother one of the Lunite breeders here. James Diller, a fugitive twenty-five years ago on Earth, had gathered fifty or more criminals about him.

In some hidden lair—equipped with lavish funds which their banditry had provided—Diller had built his little space-flying globe, and had perfected the Clayton theories of invisibility. He and his men had wildly thought then that they might at will raid the Earth—perhaps dominate it.

But then, pressed by Earth's crime-trackers, they had decided to embark into space. They had landed here on the moon with the space-globe crashing. With Targg grown to manhood to help his father, only recently had the space-shuttling globe been repaired.

I gestured. "And those are your father's men over there now?"

Targg grinned. "What is left of them, yes. They are middle-aged men now—but still they have their ideas. It must be deprivation indeed, when one can remember the beauty of Earth-women. My father told me—"

"And so you came to Earth for some of our girls," I interrupted him.

"Ah, but that was the motive only

of those men you see over there." His gesture was deprecating, but his smile widened. "Naturally when the Great Saar ordered the trip, our Earthmen here were pleased. So I promised to bring them girls. They are disappointed now that there are not more—"

"The Great Saar ordered the trip?" I cut in breathlessly.

THE paean of music still was surging over the tensed amphitheater. Up on the dais the Great Saar now was standing, a trembling old man, with his arms upraised as though in exhortation of mute appeal to the Great Moon Spirit to guide this excited assemblage.

"Yes, he ordered the trip," Targg answered.

It was all made clear. The Moon Ruler, obviously near the end of his natural life, had had a vision: a vision of a Moon Priestess, the living incarnation of the Great Moon Spirit. There had been none for generations, and the Great Saar had prayed that knowledge would be given him to select one.

And the vision had come. A strange vision, because it told him that the Priestess was living, but not on the moon. Not on the moon, but somewhere else in the Great Universe.

The Great Saar had been able clearly to see a strange, fantastic dwelling on this strange other-world and a group of houses. He had seen a ribbon of water, shining white. A young girl, of form and beauty such as none the Great Saar had ever conceived, a girl queerly garbed, had been uppermost in that vision. On her face had seemed to glow all the traditions of the Great Moon Spirit, the longings and hopes of the Moon-people . . .

Targg momentarily stopped speaking. The music now had died. An expectant hush settled on the watching throng—a hush so great that in itself it sounded loud as thunder. And suddenly in the silence, one of the roistering Earthmen chuckled with ribald laughter, as he stood and pointed at Gloria.

A brief laugh, but it was startlingly clear in the silence. A mutter of resentment rose from the nearby Lunites. For an instant it seemed that some of them would jump up, but others held them back.

On the dais, the first of the girls now was led forward, to stand close before the Great Saar and be inspected. Rosa Smith—it could have been she. Confused, terrified, she stood forlornly while the old ruler raised his hands over her, with his voice intoning into the silence.

Beside me, Targg was chuckling. "He will ask each girl for the response: the ritual of the Great Moon Spirit. She who is our Priestess, and she only, of course, will know the inspirational response."

Was that Priestess to be Gloria? I recalled her strange murmured words, her queer look on several occasions . . . But why, of all the earth to choose from, had Targg and his abductors come to Granton? To Professor Clayton's—to Gloria?

I murmured my thoughts to Targg.

"The vision had many aspects," he said. "And the Great Saar told them to my father. And my father recognized that particular place on Earth. The vision mentioned an old man with the Priestess. My father could tell that was Professor Clayton. And just as my father was dying but a short time ago, he told me how to find the place."

Had that been James Diller's animosity toward Professor Clayton, prompting him to send these abductors to the home of his old enemy, to seize Gloria? Was it that? Or was it something more? Something of the great un-

known, far beyond the understanding of mortals . . .

"I have told the Great Saar it must of course be Gloria Clayton," Targg was saying. "He thinks so too, but the ritual now will make him quite sure. And when she is chosen—"

TARGG sucked in his breath, and his voice grew intense.

"She is very beautiful, Alan Kent. She will rule here—with me."

He had been staring out across the riot of color at Gloria, as she stood bathed in the prismatic beams on the dais. But now he turned to me, and the old mocking smile was on his face.

"I do not mind telling you, Kent—today is my great day. Oh, I have it all planned! A clever fellow is Targg, don't you think? Our Priestess will be acclaimed by the people. And then—"

His lean gray hand slid to his belt. A knife was there.

"A little thrust with that, Kent. The Great Saar will be dead. But who cares? The people have a new ruler—their Priestess. But at best, she is only a girl. And so Targg will rule with her. You see? She and I will—"

His ironic voice suddenly died. He gasped, clutched my arm.

"My God, Kent, look there!"

And Merlin, sitting beside us, gasped out an oath.

For that terrible second we all three sat stricken. The thing was over in an instant, before there was anything that even Targg could try to do.

Rosa Smith was trying to respond to the ritual of gestures and incantations from the Great Saar. And then she was thrust aside, and another of the girls brought forward. Little Anne Johnson, this time.

But our sudden terror was none of that. Behind the line of girls a figure was creeping—a bent, puffed female figure with dangling hair. It was the Lunite breeder, Tara, who had been on the globe. And loving Targg, at last her smouldering hatred for this beautiful Earth-girl had blazed into a consuming fire. A naked knife blade glinted in her hand as she furtively moved toward Gloria.

Targg and I together leaped to our feet. My voice with a wild scream of warning rang out over the silence. Tara leaped, with her knife stabbing.

But she was too late! One of the guards saw her. With a huge ten-foot pounce, he landed upon her. A knobbed metal bludgeon in his hand crashed down. With skull smashed into a noisome mass, Tara wilted down into a quivering, inert heap. And then the guards picked up her body and flung it away . . .

Targg had vanished again from beside us. The ceremony went on, with the barbaric rhythm of the music soft now in the distance. Incense smudges began burning, an aromatic fragrance that wafted toward us. The smell of it made my head reel a little at first.

The prismatic lights now were intensifying, so bright on the dais that the silent, watching throng on the circular terraced tiers seemed almost in shadow. One by one the girls were rejected as Moon Priestess.

Merlin clutched me. "Where is Anne? What became of Anne? Alan, listen, can't we get away from here?" he asked desperately.

There certainly seemed no chance, with our alert guards so close. The rejected girls were being held at the side of the dais. In the shadows there, it seemed that the roistering, half-drunken Earthmen were pressing forward. One of them lurched too far, trying to clutch at the nearest girl.

The guards whirled on him and his fellows pulled him back. A few Lunites

had leaped from the nearest seats. There was a momentary scuffle, the makings of a riot. But it was over in a moment. Over? To me it was like a little spark, barely quenched before it could ignite a vast explosion . . .

CHAPTER V

Hour of Trial

NOW Gloria was left standing alone, and a great reverberating murmur rose from the throng as she was led before the Great Saar.

Priestess of the Moon! It was as though everyone in this multitude now suddenly knew that here was their Priestess, so that they made as if to cheer.

Then they were silent, awed, watching the Great Saar as his trembling arms went up and his quavering old voice rose, to mingle with the throbbing music.

Fascinated, numbed, stricken of every thought save Gloria, I stared breathless. Never had she seemed so beautiful. Straight and slim, she was, in her corded black-and-white trousers and white blouse. The prismatic light drenched her with its riot of color, concentrating now into a beam upon her.

It sparkled in the coiled braids of her pale-gold hair on her head. It bathed her, glowing on her so that suddenly, to me as well as to all the vast throng, she was transfigured into something momentarily more than human.

A goddess! The look of a goddess shone from her; radiated from her like an aura. Head erect, tense, with her arms at her sides, she was staring as though in a trance. Suddenly she was exalted. Her face was transfigured—the face of a veritable Madonna!

This was the ritual of the Great Moon Spirit. The throng was murmuring now, low murmurs of triumph and of awe; murmurs rising louder because everyone could see that the quest was ended.

Gloria was on her knees now; then up again, with a slow barbaric swaying of her hips to the faint music. As though to answer her the weird harmonies welled into a great torrent of sound.

The Priestess of the moon, dancing now! Then she was standing to face the obeisance of her people, with her arms upraised as she went suddenly stiff, rigid as a beautiful statue.

Suddenly my attention was drawn to another little scuffle at the edge of the dais. But no one noticed it in the crowd. No one over there cared now, as all stared at Gloria.

One of the drunken Earthmen had seized Anne Johnson; picked her up in his arms, and with a great twenty-foot leap, unimpeded by the moon's slight gravity, had hurtled his fellows, landed on his feet and run.

Then I saw him again, bolting seemingly for the space-globe, which stood off to one side a few hundred yards away from me.

It brought me to my senses. Beside me, my two guards were now staring, rapt and absorbed as everyone else in Gloria Clayton. That villain carrying Anne—

I turned to Merlin. A figure lay prone on the ground just behind me! Our third guard, with his own knife buried in his heart! And Merlin was gone!

And then suddenly, over by the side of the dais, there was a commotion which could not be ignored. Like an electric spark plunged into a train of powder, it spread.

Several of the drunken men were fighting over girls they had seized. Lunites and the guards jumped at

them. A towering, burly Earthman, stronger than any Lunite, scattered the Moon-men. His knife flashed viciously.

One of the Lunites fell, and the drunken renegade lifted the body up, hurled it thirty feet, where it went crashing into the seated Lunites.

A SIGNAL! Targg's prearranged signal, because of course he had planned all this.

I whirled suddenly. The guard nearest me had forgotten me completely. My fist felled him. My fist squished noisomely into his soft-boned, puffy face. He went down, splattering.

The other guard, suddenly aware of me, tried to raise his weapon. I lunged at him, knocked him backward and fell on him bodily. His skull hit a rock, smashed; and I staggered to my feet.

The scuffle at the dais had widened now. Over all the throng there was sudden wild panic. Lunites jumped to their feet, some trying to run away, some fighting forward. In an instant it was a wildly milling throng, fighting itself. Women screamed and rushing, frenzied people trampled each other.

I dashed from the little ledge, down a rocky path. If I could get to the dais, fight my way through the crowd that now was surging in front of me, then I could reach Gloria.

I could see her up there, crumpled now, with the spell upon her broken so that she was only a huddled, terrified little Earthgirl.

Desperately I scattered a group of Lunites who came milling at me. And then suddenly, breathless after a great leap, I stopped. The dais was only a hundred feet ahead of me now. Up there the trembling old ruler was trying to shout orders over the chaos.

Then I saw Targg behind him, crafty, murderous half-breed that he was. With bared knife he leaped. The Great Saar went down!

And then Targg had jumped for Gloria. Picking her up, he bounded in great leaps diagonally across the open space between the dais and the circular seats. He headed back, partly toward me; headed for the space-globe. I whirled to try and cut him off.

Blood on the moon! The tumultuous scene was abruptly plunged into a new horror. As I fought my way toward the space globe, a beam of light-fire leaped from it, spreading blue and yellow flame.

Desperately I sprang sideward with all my strength, so that I sailed upward in a low arc, with outstretched arms to balance me. The fire-beam went past, barely missing me!

Then I realized that it had not been aimed particularly at me, this thinning, fan-shaped electro-light that seemed to ignite the air through which it darted.

Blood on the moon! Within a moment the turmoil of the great amphitheater was blighted into a ghastly carnage. Garments of the milling people took fire. Screams rose from stricken Lunites, trying in agonized frenzy to leap into the air as their clothing flamed. A frenzied group, these creatures, milling about, trampling their burning fellows.

This was Targg's plan at the full fruition of its murderous horror. He would get away in the space globe now, with as many of the girls and those of his men who were able to reach it. But first he would spread death and terror here in the midst of this little city.

Then later he would come back, mated with the Priestess of the moon, forcing her to his will, so that she would exhort her awed people to accept him.

I approached the space globe, running, leaping, scrambling, with my mind

tumultuous as the scene itself, so that I had no plan save to get to Gloria. The spreading beam of darting, quivering with smoke now: a huge, rolling, yellow-fire was over me and to the side.

The great amphitheater was turgid green cloud. It masked the flaming, wilting human forms, a malodorous smoke-cloud, nauseous with the smell of burning flesh.

THE flame-beam was spraying from a port up at the globe's control room. Suddenly, inexplicably, it was extinguished. And then outside on the rocks, near the globe's open door, I saw Targg with Gloria.

She hung limp, half fainting against him; and he stood for that moment, turning into view, with an ironic, triumphant leer at the carnage he had caused. He did not see me as I rose in the air, hurtling toward him.

Everything was so swift and so chaotic—a myriad little things of desperate frenzy, transpiring here in these crowded seconds. In the midst of my sailing leap, I was aware of George Merlin and one of the half-drunken Earthmen, as they fought in the space-globe's doorway. Little Anne was crouched there with one hand clutching at her breast and the other flung to her mouth in her terror . . .

I struck Targg with the impact of a catapulted rock; gripped him as we went backward and rolled.

"You!" he gasped. "Well, the end of you now—"

His lean gray fingers clutched at my throat. The frenzy upon me blurred red my vision of Targg's weird, leering face as it pressed down upon me.

With a wild lunge I heaved him upward, broke his hold upon my throat. And then I was back on him like a pouncing, snarling puma. I pounded his head on the rocky ground; lifted him, smashed him down again until his skull broke.

Panting, I staggered to my feet. Merlin was shouting.

"Alan! Alan! Come on, hurry—"

Faithful George Merlin, with an arm around Anne, was in the globe doorway. Out of a nearby swirl of the nauseous, turgid smoke, a crowd of milling Lunites surged forward.

Frenzied, shouting, hideous, these little men, unable to distinguish who or what was victor here screamed and threatened as they plunged for the space-globe from which the murderous flaming death had spewed at them.

"Alan! Good God—" Merlin cried. "Look out for them—"

Almost a single leap carried me to where Gloria lay on the rocks. I seized her, jumped with her for the doorway.

"Inside!" Merlin gasped. "I'll bar the door—you work the controls."

He slid the door, bolted it as in another second the raging Lunites plunged against it.

"Gloria! You're all right?"

"Yes! Oh, yes, Alan! Oh — what happened—"

Mercifully, to Gloria, it had been like a confused dream, back there on the dais. A numbness caused by her terror? Or had it been really something more than that?

A transfiguration? But it had passed now.

The four of us mounted to the control turret. Another of the bandit Earthmen—he who had wielded the fire-spray through the porthole—lay here, weltering in his own blood beside his wrecked apparatus, where Merlin had stabbed him.

I shoved at the controls. I knew how to work them; I had watched Targg, in the flight from Earth. The little space-globe quivered. Hundreds of the frenzied Lunites were raging outside now.

The globe quivered, slowly rose! With my arm around Gloria, I stood at one of the ports. The great malodorous yellow-green cloud of smoke was drifting away.

AMPHITHEATER of the dead! A thousand or more ghastly, charred figures lying strewn about . . . Women with little children hugged close to them, their clothes almost burned away, their puffed bodies fused into a noisome mass of charred flesh . . .

Here and there a pitiful, leprous form still alive, trying to crawl . . . Little winnowing spirals of flame, where other things once human were still burning . . . Tiny pyres of horror . . .

I held Gloria's face against me so that she might not see. Beside us Merlin was holding Anne. The terrible scene dropped away as slowly we rose into the shining darkness.

THERE SEEMS little for me to add. Nine years have passed since those weird, chaotic events which I have tried to set down here as simply and as vividly as I could. Gloria and I are married now. Our little son is four years old, cast as we would have him in the image of us both.

The Diller space-globe, as you doubtless remember, I wrecked hopelessly when we landed back on Earth, so that we four barely escaped with our lives.

But as you also of course know, there have been recently many short, tentative space flights near Earth, in the newly developed flyers. And an expedition—starting only last week—is now determined to reach the moon.

Perhaps it is there now. Will it be received in friendly fashion as its leaders hope? Or will it be assailed by the outraged Lunites? Surely there can be none more interested in such an eventuality than Gloria and myself. . . .

My life with Gloria has been happy beyond my fondest dreams. But though I seldom speak of it, that scene of Gloria on the dais is always in my mind. She remembers little of it fortunately.

But she has confessed that all her life, since she was a child, the moon at night, riding our heavens, has always fascinated her: arousing strange nameless thoughts, nameless longings—

Just a coincidence, of course. Her seeming response to the Great Saar's ritual—that was just coincidence, so that the old ruler and the awed multitude, by wishful thinking, persuaded themselves that they had found their goddess.

But—*was it only that?*

I am writing this now near dawn. It has been a sultry, hot summer night. In mid-evening Gloria and I were seated in our garden; and the full moon rose. A blood-red moon, for a time, with the earth's hot atmosphere staining the vision of it crimson, where it hung low on the horizon.

And Gloria stared at it so queerly. Thinking—what?

I said nothing. And then suddenly she murmured,

"No! No—my duty lies here with you, Alan. With you—and with our little son—"

I held her in my arms; kissed her gently. There was nothing to say.

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

(Concluded from page 8)

progressing atomic power is just a matter of between five and ten years, and if our anticipations mean anything, it'll be one heck of a blitzkrieg all over the place.

It certainly doesn't make us feel very happy to realize that the long-dreamed-of atomic power is coming to reality right in the middle of the most horrible war that has ever struck the earth.

IMAGINE if you can (Navy contracts recently mentioned seven 35,000 to 53,000 ton battleships, so it isn't so hard to envisage), giant ships, invulnerable even to air attack, powered by atomic motors, which permit them to rove the world without thought of bases, or of being out of "gas" so to speak. They float in their power source — p l a i n water! And one pound of U-235 would produce an unbelievable amount of steady power at a voltage of 2,000,000.

IMAGINE also giant bombers capable of carrying twenty tons of bombs, flying, if necessary, all the way around the world without having to consider any landing field other than their original starting place, and able to fly for weeks, if it is so desired or required.

"Horace invented it in his spare time. It throws the peanuts out here and the shells into the past."

YES, you can imagine all that, because it's been told in science fiction for years. But your editors would rather not. We have made numberless predictions, and so many of them are now coming true, that we feel like the Greek messenger who brought news of defeat and who was killed for bringing it.

WE'D much rather think of what could be done with atomic power to build and send rocket ships to the moon, to Mars, to Venus. All of which makes Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., something of a prophet too, because his story in which a space ship is powered by steam is now quite possible. We'll have to share this credit with Warner Van Lorne, however, who did it in "Wanted: 7 Fearless Engineers" back in February, 1939. We'd much rather see "steam" rockets flying into space as the practical result of the development of atomic power

MAYBE you've noticed that the Observatory is much longer this month than usual. This is due to the popularity of the feature, and with all due modesty, we say thanks for your many letters. We'll try to expand it each month hereafter, and try to keep it as interesting as you've said it has been in the past.

IN 1933 H. G. Wells, the famous English author, made the following predictions:

1934—General invasion of China by Japan.
1935—Tokio bombed in "retaliation" raids.
1937—Naval war; U. S. versus Japan
1939—Japan loses 1,900,000 in disastrous retreat from China.
1940—War; Germany versus Poland.
1943—France enters conflict; second World War begins.
1949—"Peace of Exhaustion" arranged.
1960—Disruption of U.S. as a nation.
1965—Basra Conference; Air dictatorship established.
1968—Landship destroys London.
1978 — World State organization.

On the whole, you've got to admit that Wells has done a pretty good job of prediction so far.

Four out of six of his first predictions have come true, and if we give him the credit for the same ratio on the others, at least three of his future predictions will come to pass.

CARUSO, the world-famous singer, often demonstrated the power of his voice by shattering a vibrating goblet. First the goblet would be struck lightly with a tuning fork, Caruso would listen eagerly for the pitch, take a deep breath, and hold his note at the same pitch as the goblet.

THE planet Venus has nothing on us. If the whole earth were to be smoothed out, the mountains leveled, and the gullies of the ocean bottom filled, the earth would be covered over completely with water a mile and a half deep.

AND, my dear readers, that's a good place to call it quits for this month.—*Rap*

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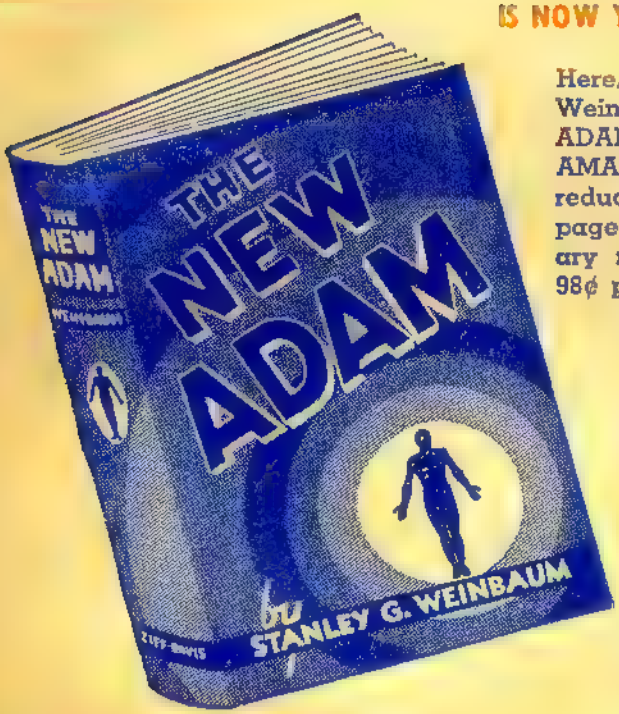

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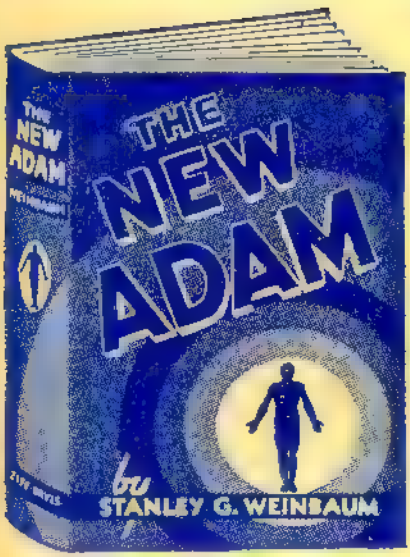

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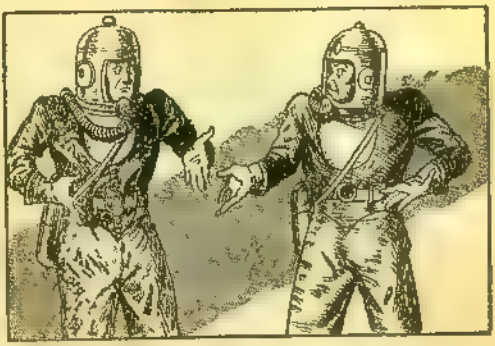

THE STORY BEHIND THE CONTEST

Ever since science fiction first appeared, way back in April, 1926, its readers have played a little game which they call 'find the error." For nearly fifteen years now you readers have been picking out the author's scientific mistakes and writing the editor about them.

Now, at last, comes the postman's "holiday." Your editor conceived the idea that as long as the readers got such a tremendous kick out of detecting scientific faults in the stories in AMAZING STORIES, why not present a story purposely filed with errors, and give the readers a chance to "go to town" on them? And that's exactly what we've done.

Looking around for an author who could be depended upon to make no mistake in making mistakes, we decided on Milton Kaletsky, who is a pretty fair scientist in his own right. Then we asked him to "fumble" a few thousand words for us, and he did exactly that. The result is "The Planet of Errors," beginning on pages 70-71.

Now write us a letter, listing all the mistakes in science you can find, and tell us why you think they are mistakes. It isn't necessary to correct the mistakes because they contradict each other anyway. For your convenience in checking errors, vertical columns have been provided down each page in which you can indicate errors as you find them.

Prizes will be awarded first on the basis of the most errors discovered; second on the validity of your reasons for terming the error as such; and third on neatness and directness of presentation. No methods of unusual presentation, stunts, etc., will receive any special consideration. All entries should be either typewritten, or written in ink, on one side of the paper. Please be as brief and to the point as possible.

Prize winners will be announced in the February issue, but their letters will not be reproduced.

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1. Contest open to all, except employees of AMAZING STORIES, the Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., and their families.
2. Write a letter listing all the errors in science you can find in the story "The Planet of Errors." In each case give your reason for tagging the mistake as such.
3. Fill out and return with your letter the coupon below, or a reasonable facsimile, if you do not wish to deface your magazine.
4. No entry will be returned.
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6. The Editors of AMAZING STORIES will be the judges in this contest. Their decision is accepted as final by all contestants.
7. All entries must be in the hands of the Contest Editor by Nov. 15, 1940. The winners will be announced in the February issue of AMAZING STORIES. In case of ties, letters will be judged as to neatness, conciseness, and clarity of presentation.
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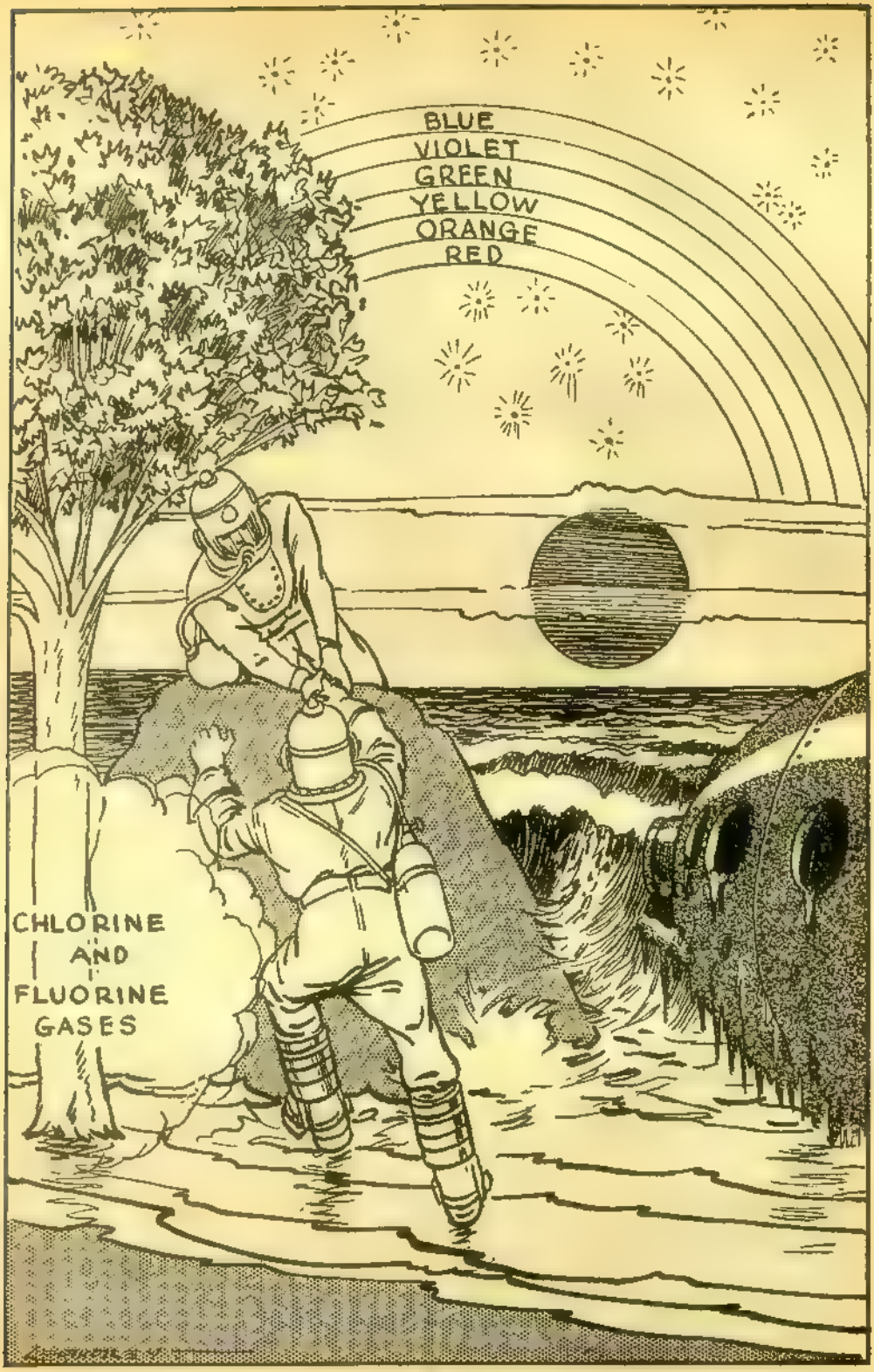
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The PLANET OF ERRORS

by MILTON KALETSKY

"HOLY jumping Jupiter!" Kent Hunter shouted. "Hey—Pete! Wake up!"

Pete Triffler, asleep in his tiny cot deeper in the two-man scout spacecruiser, mumbled a curse and rolled over. "Go take a flying—"

"Pete!" Hunter bent to the spectroscope again, his eyes shining. "Hey, Pete—get up and take a look through the Spec. We've found it!"

"Huh?"

"BOROTRON!"

"So what?" Triffler growled. Then he sat up suddenly. *"What?"* he howled. In a twinkling he jumped out of the cot and ran, half-clad, down the narrow corridor to the pilot room where Hunter sat. "If this is all a deep laid plan to disturb my slumber. . . ." he muttered, bending down to the spectroscope. He looked up, looked back to the spectroscope, then back to Hunter. "By the nine moons," he babbled, "can it be that we have found it?"

"Get out of my way," Hunter said. "I'll swing a close orbit and we'll have a short range view."

Both men sat nervously as the ship darted in closer to the planet in the view-finder. And both were thinking the same thoughts. Four months of semi-exile in a little scout ship, trying to track down the meaningless scrawls in the log of a Borotron-laden ship. They remembered the day when it had landed, a small freighter with its crew of six completely mad for days. And when they had recovered their senses, they told a story of a planet that was beyond all belief.

"Borotron!" they babbled, and those who heard the name of the incomparably precious element had shivered with queer mixtures of emotions. "Entire . . . planet . . . laced with veins of . . . borotron!"

It couldn't be true. *But if it were true?* Then another of the fantastically rich lodes of treasure had been found, and it would be the fifth time in all history! The unstable element that had to be compounded painfully by huge, trained groups of scientists, working in mammoth laboratories, would again be mined, be taken in enormous chunks from a distant world. And what of the new worlds that would open after that?

For borotron ran the mighty spaceships of that year of 2542. Borotron fed the machines, lit the world, kindled the energy. And if the log of that mad little freighter was accurate, this find was greater than all of them! Immediately the scouts had been sent out in swarms, to cover the dimmest reaches of interstellar space, trying to retrace the erratic voyage of that freighter that had been lost for months. . . .

"Us," said Pete Triffler, dazed. "Imagine that—*we're* going to be the ones who found it."

When the little ship had come closer, Kent Hunter spoke. "Pete," he said, "I don't know why, but I have a strange feeling in my bones." His manner was half amused, half serious. "I have a feeling that this planet is very odd. It seems to be affecting me . . . there's no sense in the way I'm going about things."

But he bent again to the Spectroscope, and gazed out at the small, deep-red star that was the sun of the planet they had sought. It had cooled almost to darkness, and the planet itself, completely without satellites, circled it.

"You see?" said Hunter. "That should mean something, especially if we find water on the planet."

Triffler looked into the electro-telescope and calculated swiftly. "Kent," he said, "we're going to have a prob-

√ *

* Note how vertical columns may be used to check errors as you find them.—Ed.

lem. I figure this planet is more vast and dense than Jupiter, and the gravity must be terrific."

Hunter nodded briefly. He had swung the Spectroscope to the planet itself, focusing on the solid ground to analyze the pale sunlight that it reflected. "Yes," he said, slowly, "there's borotron everywhere. And silicon, iron, and other elements. But no radium, no beryllium, and not the slightest trace of carbon. . . ." He looked up at Triffler and suddenly began to laugh. "I'm going nuts!"

"What's the matter?" Triffler smiled at him. "What you've found can be the absolute truth. You're not doubtful of your accuracy?"

"No," Hunter continued laughing. "But my method! It's insane!"

The next minute Triffler had joined the laughter. After a moment, he said, "To hell with it—let's continue! Spiral in."

Still amused and exultant, Kent Hunter drove the scout in, no fact escaping his attention, *for every fact was important now.* He noticed the planet was rotating rapidly on its axis, aimed directly at the red sun. Down toward the northern pole the ship dropped, into a heavy, greenish atmosphere, and swooped to a landing on a beach beside a rolling ocean.

"Well, Kent," Triffler sighed, "we're going to leave this tub after four months of it. Eager as I am?" He grinned. "But there are precautions even a fool would take."

"Thank you," Hunter replied with heavy sarcasm. "I'll be careful." Cautiously, he drew in a sample of the very heavy atmosphere for chemical analysis. Oxygen there was in sufficient quantity, but chlorine and fluorine, deadly poisons, constituted fully three-fourths of the air. Carbon dioxide and water vapor, surprisingly enough, were entirely absent.

But the temperature—100 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit—was what stopped them. At that temperature, they couldn't possibly have taken. . . . "Ah," Hunter smiled, tapping his forehead, "Mr. Triffler, perhaps you will explain?"

But Triffler said, "I've just tested the lovely waters of this lovely ocean. It is almost pure hydrofluoric acid."

The two men looked at each other and burst out laughing again, then started to dress. They slid into their regulation rubber suits, clamped the heavy iron and glass helmets to their shoulders, tested their radio communicators. The oxygen tanks were in working order, and they had enough of the necessities to hold them awhile. At the last minute, Hunter said, "Hey, we're forgetting the lead weights!" and then they both tied the weights to their ankles.

"Cockeyed!" Triffler grinned. "Completely cockeyed!" And they slid through the air lock.

Overhead, the feeble red sun cast their shadows downward. "This way!" Hunter shouted, and he took a great leap toward a gray metallic streak in the distance. With a chortle of surprise, Triffler sped after him, bounding up and down, until both men came to a halt.

Directly before them stretched the first thick lines of the tell-tale vein It was borotron; there was no doubt of it! "Kent!" Triffler shouted, "Oh, my God! Will you look at it?" He stared at Hunter's face, overcome with a fierce joy. Hunter didn't answer, because he didn't have to. His face was radiantly happy.

But suddenly, Triffler noticed the soft, white pulpish mass near them, and the mad curiosity that this odd planet had aroused in them, flamed anew. "Kent," he said, "this is impossible—but it's pure sodium!"

The two men faced each other and Hunter made a face. "C'mere up this hill," he said, repressing the laughter on his lips, "and hold on to your brain." Triffler waded through the sodium toward where the ground rose in low hills. And there—behind the protection of the hill, he saw . . . a tree . . . *a Maple tree!*

Silently, both men approached it; they poked their fingers into it, tearing off leaves and otherwise examining it. Then Hunter said, "Yep. A genuine, bonafide Maple tree that might be growing this minute in Vermont." He turned to Triffler.

"Hey," said Triffler, "what are you scratching your head for? You can't

feel it through that iron helmet!"

Hunter grinned foolishly. "You know what's happening here, don't you, Pete?" he said. "Some of the basic premises seem to be wrong—dead wrong—but not only doesn't that not stop things from happening, but even the continuity of wrongness goes on!"

A sharp clap of thunder punctuated his words. Both men spun and scanned the horizon. Twenty miles away, over a ridge of mountains, black rain clouds approached with the speed of a spaceship. Again the thunder roared, and a sharp, brilliant streak of lightning followed.

Neither man stopped to marvel at this. With a warning shout, both began racing back to their ship, but the storm overtook them. Down from blackened skies poured a raging torrent that swirled about their legs, almost tumbling Hunter down into a ravine once. They found safety on a low hill, and Triffler helped Hunter up beside him.

Out of breath though they were, neither could refrain from laughing. "Water!" Triffler said, *"here!"* But as quickly as it had come, the storm vanished, and a magnificent rainbow arched high across the sky.

The two space scouts stared incredulously at the sun and the multicolored arch that blazed directly over it—brilliant blue, bright violet, pale green, pallid yellow, and edging away into faint orange and red.

"Well," said Hunter, flatly, "this is the end. There can't be anything after this. Why, this rainbow is completely screwy on at least two counts, maybe more. . . ."

"Listen, Kent," said Triffler. "We've found what we came for. Why the hell don't we get out while we still remember who we are."

"A more excellent piece of advice I have never encountered," Hunter said, seriously. He turned to go back to the ship, and stopped abruptly . . . for the ship was a bare fifty yards off—when they had left it at least a mile away! Could they have miscalculated, or walked in a circle?

Suddenly the ship seemed to be shimmering and growing indistinct, and as the two men gazed at it, it vanished altogether!

Hunter laughed aloud, and Triffler protested at the noise he was making inside the helmet. "Of course!" Hunter laughed, "it's a mirage!"

"I know that too," agreed Triffler, "except that there couldn't possibly be a mirage on this planet because—"

Hunter snorted, interrupting. "There aren't any 'becauses' here. Let's get back. It's getting dark."

Night had fallen by the time they reached the ship; something they had not thought could happen, even here. Through the darkness, the steady, unchanging light of the stars shone brilliantly, never wavering in the heavy, murky atmosphere. Soon they sighted the dark bulk of the spacecraft, safe and real. But relief turned to dismay, for the vessel was floating offshore, being carried away by the tide which was coming in.

"Damn me for a Martian zany!" Triffler growled. "The way I had things figured, there just couldn't be any tides. And here it is, taking the ship with it!"

They ran down the beach and plunged into the ocean up to their knees. Hunter swung open the airlock and Triffler climbed in behind him. Wearily they went to the control board, and now both smiled as they punched out their homeward course. Only then did they bother removing their helmets and space garb.

"Well, Pete," said Hunter. "Here's the Space Log. What are we going to write in it? If we tell half the things we've seen, they'll keep us locked up in the nut hatch until they've had a chance to come here themselves."

"I'll take care of that," said Triffler, sitting down to the Log. He wrote slowly.

October 14, 2946, Earth Standard Time: 18:43. A great day. Discovered immense deposits of Borotron on un-named planet, which we hereby designate as Halloway's Planet, in honor of our Commanding Officer, General Halloway. Explored a little; nothing unusual occurred. All in the day's work. Signed: Lieut. Peter Triffler, USIC.

THE VISIBLE

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

OSCAR DOOLITTLE cleared his throat with a nervous, tittering cough as he stepped up to the cosmetic counter of Natz's Nifty Drug Store.

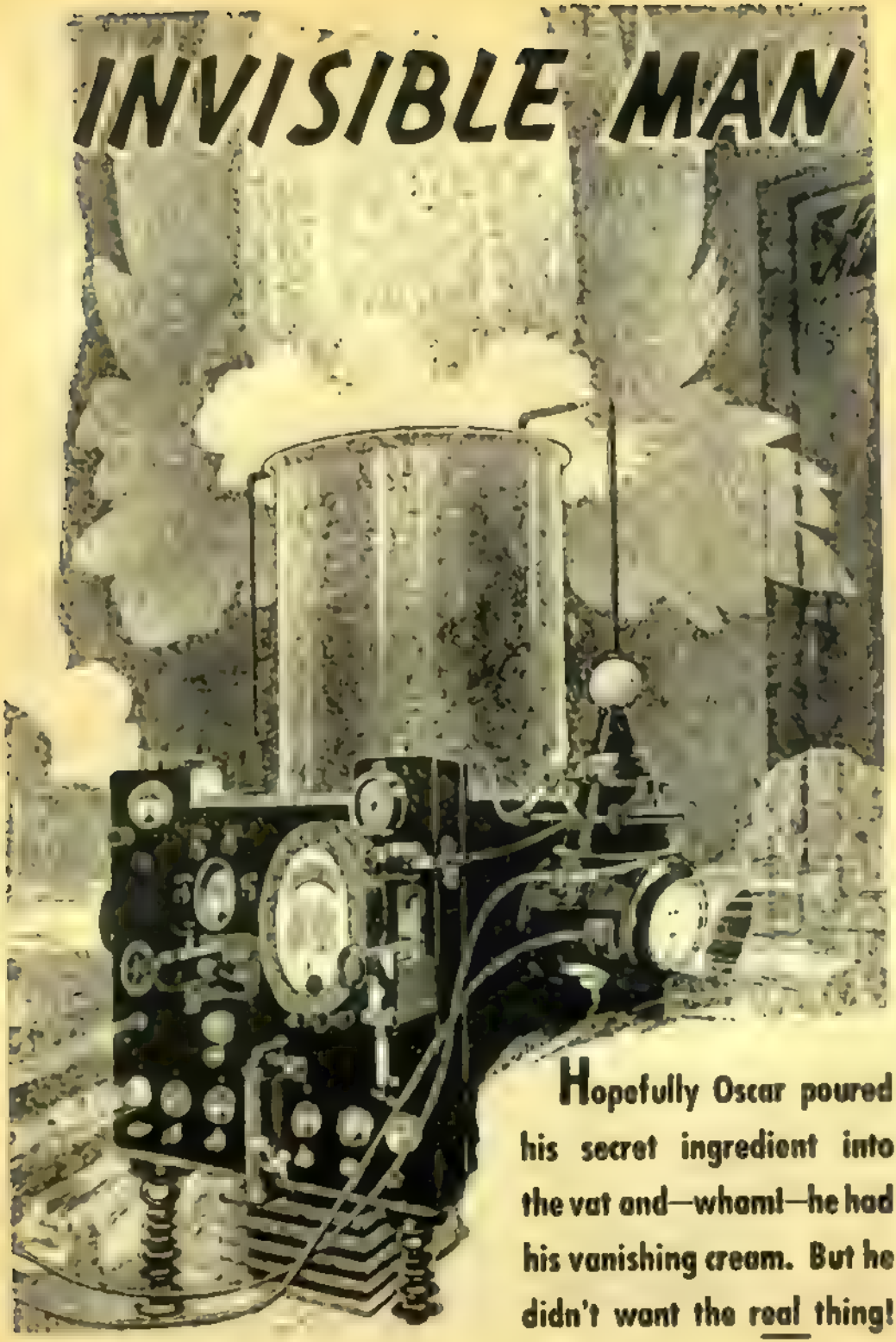
"I want fifty pounds of vanishing cream," he said to the professionally pleasant-looking young man, who regarded him from behind the gleaming array of bottles. "I hope you've got that much," he added anxiously, "because it's very important that I have it today."

"Fifty pounds?" the clerk repeated incredulously. "Why, that—"

He broke off suddenly and peered closely at Oscar. He saw a wispy, slight individual, dressed in a limp brown suit that hung tiredly over bony shoulders. And large brown eyes gleam-

There came a tremendous roar and Oscar Doolittle was hurled from his feet

INVISIBLE MAN



Hopefully Oscar poured his secret ingredient into the vat and—whaml—he had his vanishing cream. But he didn't want the real thing!

ing with hopeful excitement.

The young clerk's puzzled stare gradually changed to one of sympathetic understanding.

"Now, now," he said soothingly, "you just wait right here and I'll go and see about your—er—fifty pounds of vanishing cream. I'll be back in a jiffy and maybe you'd better fan yourself with your hat while I'm gone. It might help a little."

"Thank you," Oscar said, moved by this friendly solicitude. "Thanks a lot, but I'm really quite comfortable."

The clerk backed away from Oscar, smiling gently.

"Don't go away," he said coaxingly, turned and scurried off down the aisle.

At the end of the aisle he jerked open a door and stumbled breathlessly into a small office where a fat, red-faced man sat smoking a thin cigar.

"Quick, Mr. Natz," he hissed. "Call the police! There's a madman outside. He says he wants to buy fifty pounds of vanishing cream. He may be dangerous."

Mr. Natz digested this information in silence and then squinted upward through the wreaths of smoke at his trembling employee.

"Fifty pounds," he repeated thoughtfully. "Did he offer to pay for it?"

"Why, gosh," his clerk stuttered, "I didn't think to ask him."

"Well," said Mr. Natz gloomily, "if he offers to pay for it, he probably *is* crazy. But if we don't take his money, *we're* crazy. I'll go out and talk to him."

With this he hoisted himself from his chair and waddled out of the office, followed by his fluttering clerk.

Mr. Natz approached Oscar from the side, like a man closing in on a skittish horse. Enboldened by Oscar's harmless appearance he stepped closer and asked:

"Are you the gentleman who wanted the vanishing cream?"

Oscar turned at the sound of the voice, blinking rapidly.

"Yes. Yes, indeed," he said, "I want fifty pounds of it." He looked from Mr. Natz to the bulging-eyed clerk anxiously. "Why," he said weakly, "is there something wrong about that?"

"Not if you've got the money to pay for it," Natz said hopefully.

"Oh, is that all?" Oscar's sigh was relieved. "Certainly I have the money. I've been saving it for weeks."

Natz shrugged resignedly. "Okay," he said. "You got the money, we got the cream."

"Oh, that's fine," Oscar beamed. "Will you wrap it up for me right away? You see, I have to take it home before I go to work and I don't want to be late. I haven't been late in eleven years," he finished proudly.

"All right, buddy," Natz said. "Far be it from us to interfere with a record like that. Willie," he barked at the clerk, "get a hamper from the basement and bring up the freight scales."

Willie nodded vaguely. With a final unconvinced look at Oscar, he hurried off. Within several minutes he was back, pushing a cumbersome scale on rollers and dragging behind him a spacious wicker basket.

He shoved the scale toward the cosmetic counter and placed the basket on its flat, wide weighing plate. Then, with the assistance of Mr. Natz, he began piling the heavy jars of white vanishing cream into the basket. Jar after jar was loaded into the basket, and Oscar hummed happily as it creaked protestingly under their weight.

"That just about does it," Mr. Natz said finally. He got down on his knees and peered at the indicator. "Yep, Fifty pounds, six ounces. We'll throw in the ounces for good measure."

"Gosh, thanks!" Oscar said gratefully. His large brown eyes beamed delightedly as Mr. Natz got out a pad of scratch paper and a stubby pencil and began figuring up the cost of the vanishing cream.

IT was a sizable amount but Oscar counted out the money cheerfully.

"Now, how are you goin' to get it home?" Natz asked.

"Well, I don't live far," Oscar answered, "and if you'll help me get it on my shoulder I think I can manage."

"Anything you say, friend," Natz said. Stooping, he grasped a handle of the basket and with Willie's help, he hoisted it into the air.

"All right," he panted, "get under it."

Oscar took a deep breath and placed a narrow shoulder under the edge of the basket. He reached up and grasped the rim with determined fingers.

"Let go," he cried, "I've got it!"

Oscar and Willie released their grip, and the weight of the basket dug suddenly and painfully into Oscar's inadequately padded shoulders.

His knees buckled, but with a supreme effort he managed to right himself and totter toward the revolving door, the basket swaying precariously with every step.

He squeezed into the revolving door and, with a contortion that defied all existing laws of gravity and balance, he wriggled through the spinning portal and staggered onto the sidewalk.

Natz mopped his perspiring brow as Oscar disappeared around the corner of the building.

"It takes all kinds," he muttered. "It takes all kinds to make a world."

BUT in spite of laboring breath and the increasing weight of the bulky basket, Oscar Doolittle stumbled along, his soul singing with elation. He was blissfully unmindful of the curious and mirthful stares of the pedestrians he encountered.

"Let 'em laugh," he told himself optimistically. "When I introduce my new, revolutionary face cream they won't laugh—no, sir!"

Even now he could envision with ecstatic anticipation the huge headlines that would blazon his discovery to a grateful world.

DOOLITTLE DISCOVERS
DANDY DREAM CREAM!

It was going to be wonderful. And when the money began to pour in, he and Ann could get married right away. That was the most wonderful thing of all.

When Oscar finally staggered into his small bedroom, he was dizzy with exhaustion. He set his burden down on the floor and sank into a chair. But not for long. There was work to be done.

He stood up and crossed over to a strange, complicated contraption that took up almost half the space in the room.

It was a box-like affair, sprinkled with rheostats and dials and wires leading from it to a storage battery in the corner of the room. The top of the box was grilled like an electric stove and on top of this, there stood a huge glass hopper, in which a strange dark-colored liquid bubbled noisily. Vapors and gases rose from the vial, clouding the room with a murky haze.

Oscar peered at the dials and inspected the bubbling liquid.

"'Bout ready," he muttered. "No time to lose."

Turning from the odd equipment, he picked up a jar of the vanishing cream and unscrewed the metal cap. Then with feverish haste he seized a knife

and began digging the pasty cream from the jar, allowing the lumpy wads to fall splashing into the boiling liquid.

In fifteen minutes the room was littered with empty jars, and the sticky compound in the hopper had risen to a bubbling white mess that threatened to overflow onto the floor.

"Maybe I got too much," Oscar thought. But no, he was down to the last bottle of cream and there was still an inch of room left in the vat.

"Good thing," Oscar mumbled. "I've still got to put my special formula in."

WITH trembling fingers he picked up a black bottle from a work bench next to the box-like mechanism. It was filled with an oily black fluid, and as Oscar removed the cork his heart hammered with pride. It was his own formula and it was wonderful. Or, he amended, it would be wonderful.

The gluey compound was frothing and seething as he tilted the black bottle and prepared to dump its contents into the vat. He knew suddenly how Franklin must have felt when he discovered electricity: a giddy sense of exhilaration and a throbbing pulse that sent the blood racing through his veins.

It was great, and with a smile on his lips Oscar closed his eyes and emptied his special formula into the bubbling cauldron.

The results were a thousand times more surprising than Oscar, in his nimblest flight of imagination, could have conceived.

A geyser of flame shot upward from the vat and the next instant, the floor trembled with the force of a mighty explosion. Oscar was hurled to the floor and before he could move again, a sticky suffocating blanket seemed to descend upon him.

Thrashing wildly, he beat at the cloying folds that draped about him and finally managed to struggle to his feet. He forced his eyes open, and a despairing moan broke from his lips at the sight that met his stricken gaze.

His machine was utterly demolished. Parts of it were strewn from one end of the room to the other, and Oscar himself was covered from head to foot with the sticky paste that had bubbled in the bowels of the vat.

"Oh," he groaned, "something must have gone wrong."

And a moment later—"What are you up to in there, Oscar Doolittle?"

The shrill voice sounded from the hallway. Oscar trembled in panic and guilt as he recognized it. His landlady!

"It's nothing, Mrs. Spears," he quavered in terror. "I just blew a fuse. A big fuse."

"Fuse, nothing," Mrs. Spears screamed, "I'm coming in there!"

The words were slightly unnecessary, for by the time they had stopped echoing Mrs. Spears was standing in the middle of the room.

"Oh," she shrieked as her horrified gaze encountered Oscar's bespattered figure,"what have you been up to?"

"It was my invention—" Oscar began.

But Mrs. Spears' howl of anguish cut him off.

"Inventing again! This is the last straw. I've warned you before but this time I'm through. Out you go! Pack your duds and clear out of here."

She paused to stare wildly about the wreckage of the room.

"And remember," she snapped, "you don't get your trunk until this mess has been paid for."

With a final withering look at Oscar's paste-daubed figure, she marched stiffly from the room, banging the door behind her.

The slam of the door seemed to Oscar to symbolize somehow the crash of his

own hopes and dreams. He slumped into a chair and stared moodily at the strewn remains of his machine. From his sorrowful eyes two large tears welled, trickled down the pasty substance that caked his cheeks, to fall with a tiny splash to the floor.

Finally he stood up wearily. Disappointments or no, he couldn't be late for work.

CHAPTER II

Oscar's Bad Day

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, disillusioned and disconsolate, Oscar Doolittle trudged through the portals of the Midland State Bank. Even the sight of Ann, hurrying to meet him, did not revive his spirits.

"I've got some bad news for you," he said, when she stood in front of him. "My invention is a flop. I guess what everybody has been saying about me is true. I'm a failure, a washout."

If Oscar was expecting sympathy and encouragement he received a rude shock. Although he might have been prepared for it, because of late Ann had been acting anything but the rôle of a starry-eyed bride-to-be.

Ann Meade was a cuddly, shapely blonde, but the words that snapped from her now seemed very much out of place with her sugary appearance.

"If that's what people are saying," she blazed, "they're absolutely right!" You're nothing but a spineless, weak-kneed jellyfish, Oscar Doolittle! A timid, helpless doormat that other men wipe their feet on. I must have been out of my mind when I accepted your ring, but thank goodness I'm sane now! Here!"

Oscar Doolittle listened dazedly to this unflattering summary of his negative virtues, and then his incredulous eyes focused on the modest diamond ring that was thrust under his nose.

"But darling," he bleated hoarsely, "you can't do this to me! We've been engaged for five years, we've worked together here at the bank. What will Mother say?"

Ann Meade's neat little mouth looked like a steam-rollered rosebud.

"To be blunt about it," she said icily, "I don't give a darn what your mother says. Let's call our engagement a case of mistaken identity. I thought you were a man—and what a mistake that turned out to be! If you were a man—a man like that handsome Lester Mercer, now—you'd realize that no woman can love a man she doesn't respect."

WITH this withering blast as an exit line, Ann dropped the ring into Oscar's trembling fingers and marched away, her heels clattering angrily on the marble floor.

Oscar stared after her trim, rounded figure as it swished through the long corridor of the Midland State Bank and finally disappeared with a flash of silken legs around the corner of the incoming-cash department.

As the realization of his loss flooded over him, a lump the size of an ostrich egg crawled up his scrawny neck, almost choking him. It was with an effort that he managed to get himself under control. He blinked rapidly and squared his thin shoulders resolutely.

"I'll show her," he said. "I'll show her, and then she'll be sorry. "I'll—"

"What's that you're mumbling?"

The words cracked like a pistol shot next to Oscar's ear, dissolving his incipient daydream, jerking him about to face the horrible reality of Lester Mercer, chief efficiency expert of the Midland State Bank and chief fly in Oscar's ointment.

In spite of his panicky terror, Oscar

experienced a jealous twinge as he goggled at the ruddy features and healthy bulk of Lester Mercer.

This was the man responsible for Ann's angry words. Ann had become completely captivated by Mercer's dominating bluster, his executive belligerence. Ann thought he was wonderful.

Lester Mercer, it may be said, quite agreed with her.

On top of that Mercer had been taking Ann to dinner for the past month, filling her head with the idea that she was wasting herself on an insignificant little twerp like Oscar Doolittle.

It was a situation to prompt an ordinary person to swift, drastic action. But Oscar Doolittle was far from being an ordinary person.

"I'm sorry," he stuttered breathlessly. "I was just clearing my throat. No offense, I trust. I'll be getting on to work." He started away but Mercer's voice jerked him around again.

"Not so fast, Doolittle," Mercer snapped. "I can't say that I'm satisfied with the way you've been handling your work. It may be necessary to make some changes, relieve you of some of your responsibility. I'll see you about it later."

He flicked a glance at his expensive wrist-watch.

"I have to discuss a few details with Miss Meade at the present. I'll see you later."

He turned and strode away, head outthrust, in the best executive tradition.

Oscar turned sadly and tottered toward his little cubicle, his mind reeling under the double-barreled kick in the pants he had received. His invention a flop. His girl gone—the work he had done for twelve years snatched away from him. It was too much.

There was a strange buzzing in Oscar's ears and his head floated with a peculiar lightness, as he reeled past the long, barred row of tellers' windows. His whole world had gone smash, turned topsy-turvy. Nothing, he was sure, could ever shock him again.

In that he was tragically mistaken.

For as the strange buzzing noise hummed louder in his ears, things were beginning to happen, that promised to make the preceding events as commonplace and prosaic as the rest of Oscar Doolittle's entire existence.

Unaware of this, Oscar slouched dolefully along, until he reached the full-length mirror that glittered magnificently from one of the imposing columns that supported the dome-like ceiling of the Midland State Bank.

IT was Oscar's custom to pause here, adjust his tie and comb his hair, before he entered his tiny office for the day. And in spite of his benumbed, dazed condition, the habit of fourteen years was too strong to be resisted. Automatically, he moved closer, fumbling for his comb.

He was prepared to see reflected in the mirror his small, squinting, sandy-haired person, staring back at him. To his amazement, *he saw nothing of the sort!*

Instead, the mirror reflected the wide lobby of the bank, bustling clients and employees and the revolving doors that were spinning continually as people surged in and out of the building.

The mirror reflected everything in front of it, everything but Oscar Doolittle.

Stunned, Oscar crowded closer to the mirror, until he was a scant six inches from its gleaming surface.

Still he was not reflected. Reason tottered.

"What's happened?" Oscar cried frantically. "What's the matter?"

With trembling fingers he felt the

surface of the smooth glass. He could see the moist impression where his hands touched the glass, feel its cool, smooth surface under his fingers.

Suddenly, with terrifying swiftness, he realized that at the spot where his hands touched the mirror, there was nothing. *Nothing at all. No hands. No reflection.*

He jerked his hands in front of his incredulous eyes, pressed them frantically into his face. His mind wavered giddily on the brink of insanity. For while he could *feel* his hands on his face, he couldn't *see* them.

He closed his eyes tightly and a despairing moan forced itself through his teeth. Then he opened his eyes and looked down at his feet.

His glassy orbs encountered the small squares of marble flooring. His shiny shoes, baggy brown pants were gone. His incredulous eyes traveled up his vanished nether extremities, widening in horror as they saw nothing but empty space where his body should have been.

*Oscar Doolittle had become invisible!**

"My God," he groaned, "what's happened to me? Where am I?"

A stout bank official who was hurrying past, paused and looked bewilderedly.

"Thought I heard something," he muttered. "Must be my imagination."

He turned and moved away, shaking his head and mumbling to himself.

Oscar stared after him, his mind tossing about on a raging sea of despair and chaos.

"He didn't see me. I'm not just insane, this has actually happened," he told himself incredulously.

A rumbling noise grew in volume behind him. He wheeled to face a heavy refuse truck that was bearing down on him. Under the impetus of a beefy maintenance laborer it covered the distance between Oscar swiftly, menacingly.

With a breathless squawk, he sprang from the path of the heavy refuse truck, hugging the wall as it rattled past him.

Now that he was invisible, he wasn't safe. Others couldn't see him.

Panting and harried, Oscar fled along the corridor, like a hunted thing, his breath searing his lungs. His way was finally checked by the back of a large, thick-set young man, who was built like a wrestler. Driven by a frantic impulse to flee, Oscar ducked around him, lunged ahead.

His shoulder collided with a soft, yielding substance and a piercing scream split the air, shattering the tranquillity of the Midland State Bank.

RECOVERING himself, Oscar stared horror-stricken at the beautiful, angry features of the young woman he had knocked to the floor. Her escort, a tall, muscular-looking fellow, wheeled about and shook a large fist under the surprised nose of the thick-set young man with the wrestler-like build.

"What's the idea," he shouted belligerently, "of barging around knocking people over? I ought to bust you in the jaw."

"Listen, chum," the burly young man snapped, "nobody knocked your dame off her pins. She stumbled and fell, that's all. If you still feel like busting me in the jaw, why don'tcha try it!"

* While it would hardly seem possible that vanishing cream could make anyone disappear, it is conceivable that Oscar's special secret formula, which he mixed with the ordinary vanishing cream, contained an infiltrating property which was absorbed through his skin. It reacted by neutralizing skin, hair, eye and lip pigmentation and coloring, in a cycle of set periods. Therefore at definite intervals, Oscar became "invisible"—because changes within his system, influenced by the special formula, made him colorless, while at the same time impairing none of his faculties.—Ed.

An instant later a glorious free-for-all was raging in the normally peaceful domains of the Midland State Bank.

Shouts and catcalls filled the air as the quickly gathering crowd pressed forward hungrily to witness the spilling gore.

Women screamed at the top of their voices. Babies wailed in a shrill, ever-increasing crescendo. Terrified, completely bereft of reason, Oscar crowded back against the wall, staring wildly at the eruption he had caused.

A police whistle shrilled through the growing clamor. Forcing their way through the crowd, Oscar saw the grimly efficient, blue-clad bank guards. In their hands were long, vicious-looking night sticks.

"Who started this?" one of them roared. "I'll break the head of the man that started this!"

Oscar trembled guiltily. With pounding heart, he slipped and wriggled his invisible body through the crowd until he reached open space.

Then with a wild prayer of thankfulness pouring incoherently from his lips, he fled hysterically from the scene.

AN hour later, Oscar stood dejectedly in a secluded corner, staring moodily at the people streaming by him. For the past hour since he had become invisible, he had roved from one end of the bank to the other, distractedly attempting to figure out what had happened to him.

He sighed heavily, deeply. If only he could regain his visibility, take his place again with normal, visible people!

His bleak musings were disrupted by a sight that made him cringe back against the wall, his heart leaping to his mouth like a startled rabbit.

Two girls were heading toward him, toward the corner in which he had taken refuge. And one of them was Ann Meade, his fiancée until a few short hours ago.

Desperately he peered about for some avenue of escape, but it was too late. The girls had stopped in front of him, so close that he hardly dared breathe for fear of disclosing his nearness. He cowered against the wall, a hot blush staining his invisible features as he realized that the girls were talking about him.

"Oscar is such a worm," Ann was saying. "I actually feel sorry for him. I couldn't respect any man who didn't *do* things!"

Oscar cringed deeper into the corner, the words biting into his very soul. He could never win Ann back to him now. How could an invisible man "do" things?

IT was as he was contemplating his bitter future that he became conscious that something was happening to him. His head began to reel with a peculiar lightness and a strange buzzing noise filled his ears. Puzzled and apprehensive, he peered down at himself. A second later, before his outraged eyes, his body had suddenly become visible again. Baggy brown suit, black shoes, thin hair—they were all back again.

His relief and happiness exploded in one jubilant shriek.

"Wheee," he cried, "I'm back!"

This ecstatic utterance had an astonishing effect on the two girls.

They wheeled about, their mouths dropping in amazement, their eyes widening incredulously.

"Sorry if I startled you," Oscar stuttered jubilantly. "But I couldn't help it. It's so wonderful to be back again! Ann, don't you see? I'm back again. You can see me!"

Ann was the first to recover her composure.

"You little snoop!" she blazed, not at all composedly. "Sneaking around, eavesdropping on private conversations! Well, I hope you got an earful."

"But I wasn't snooping around," Oscar cried. "I was here all the time! Ann, you've got to believe me. Awful things have been happening to me."

"Awful things are going to happen to you," Ann returned grimly, "if you don't get out of my sight this instant."

Oscar backed away before her indignant gaze, futile pleading noises sounding in his throat. Sadly he turned and staggered off to his tiny cubby-hole, despair and gloom riding his sagging shoulders.

Reaching the comparative sanctuary of his office, he ducked inside and collapsed in his leather desk chair. His eyes traveled over the neat array of rubber stamps, inkwells and ledgers that adorned the top of his desk. Under the steadying effect of these prosaic objects, reason returned slowly and he began to mull, moodily and morosely, over the events of the morning.

And then suddenly, with the force of a buckshot-stuffed eelskin at the base of the neck, the reason for his incredible transformation occurred to Oscar. Somehow the vanishing cream and his special formula had blended together into a weird compound that had the effect of rendering him invisible.

On top of this deduction came another horrible thought. Would it happen again? Would he go through life snapping on and off like an electric light bulb?

Oscar was not a profane individual but under the stress of the moment, the floodgates of his soul broke, and the torment and exasperation that was dammed there overflowed in one bitter explosion.

"Oh, darn it," he groaned, "double-darn it all!"

CHAPTER III

Skulduggery

WORK was out of the question. Oscar's eyes roved about the narrow confines of his office like a trapped rat. Some horrible premonition warned him that the surprises of the day were not over.

"What will happen next?" he sighed. "What will happen next?"

As if awaiting this cue, there came a sharp rap on the door. It was repeated again, loudly, authoritatively.

"Come in," gasped Oscar.

The door swung open and the ominous bulk of Lester Mercer, efficiency expert, moved into the room. It was followed by the still more ominous bulk of Phineas Q. Botts, president of the bank. This procession was followed by two stern-looking policemen.

Phineas Q. Botts was not in the habit of dropping in casually on his lesser employees to pass the time of day. When he "dropped" in, it was a sure sign something was stirring. Oscar scrambled to his feet, joggling the inkwell on his desk.

"What's the matter," he squeaked, "is anything wrong?"

Phineas Q. Botts cleared his throat in a series of *harrumphs!* that sounded like an engine gathering speed for a long grade.

"For your sake, Doolittle," he rumbled ominously, "I hope not."

He inclined his portly figure in the direction of the efficiency expert in a sort of "After you, Alphonse" gesture.

"Mr. Mercer has a few questions to ask you. If—" Botts paused and waggled a finger sternly. "Notice I say 'if.' If you answer them to our satisfaction, you have nothing whatever to fear."

Oscar's frightened gaze turned to

Mercer's sternly unpleasant features.

"Certainly," he said nervously, "I'll be glad to answer any questions I can."

"First of all, Doolittle," Mercer began with deceptive calmness, "you took a special, negotiable bond for the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars to the vaults this morning. Is that correct?"

"That's right," gulped Oscar, wondering what this was leading to.

"Then you locked the bond in a strong-box," Mercer continued blandly, "and left the vaults." He paused, and then added with suspicious politeness, "Is my reconstruction of the scene accurate, Mr. Doolittle?"

Oscar wavered. The conviction was growing in his soul that all was not well. His eyes traveled in a helpless circle to Botts, the policemen and finally back to Mercer.

"That's right," he quavered.

Mercer paused, letting the silence weave a cold blanket over the room.

"Then," his voice was suddenly harsh, "perhaps you will tell us where the bond is now."

Oscar's eyes popped open like a hooked bass. His brain struggled to grasp the implication in Mercer's words.

"You mean," he gasped, "it's gone?"

"As if you didn't know!" Mercer snapped sarcastically. "It was a clever scheme you worked out, Doolittle, but it's not going to work. No one has entered those vaults since you left." His voice rose dramatically. "Oscar Doolittle, in the name of the Midland State Bank, I demand that you hand over that bond!"

"But I never took it!" Oscar wailed. "I don't know anything about it! It's all a terrible mistake!"

"Then you refuse," barked Mercer. He wheeled to the policemen, his voice rising to a soaring baritone.

"As officers sworn to uphold the laws and statutes of this commonwealth, I demand that you do your plain duty."

His arm shot out, pointed accusingly at Oscar's trembling figure.

"Arrest this man for grand larceny and embezzlement!"

Oscar staggered back, his mind reeling under the accumulated force of these indictments. Through the hysterical fog that swept over him, he could hear Botts speaking.

"Not so fast now. We haven't given Doolittle a chance to answer these charges. Come now, Oscar." Botts' voice had a kindly, mellow ring to it. "If you have anything to say in your defense, I, for one, will be happy to listen."

UNDER the effects of these encouraging words Oscar opened his eyes and cleared his throat. He realized that he was facing the supreme test of his life. Now, if never again, he must prove himself a man of character and dependability. If he could impress Botts with his honesty and integrity, he knew that Botts would stick by him. It was now or never.

His spirit rose to the challenge. He squared his shoulders, grimly determined to force Botts to recognize his sterling qualities. He glared around the circle of eyes. Oscar Doolittle, mouse turned lion!

He opened his mouth—but the words that he had chosen were never uttered.

For the strange buzzing noise was booming in his ears again, and with horrible clairvoyance he realized what was going to happen.

"I'm going!" Oscar cried. "I can't help it. I've got to go—but I'm not guilty!"

One of the policemen tugged at his gun.

"You're not going anywhere, bud-

dy," he said grimly. "Grab him, Charlie."

But he was too late. For before his astounded eyes the humble person of Oscar Doolittle melted into thin air for the second time that day.

He stood before them invisible, unseen to their eyes. A fine way to convince a man of your dependability, Oscar thought bitterly.

"Cripes," ejaculated the officer called Charlie, "did you see that? He disappeared right in front of our eyes!"

"Nonsense!" bellowed Phineas Q. Botts. "Drooling, driveling nonsense. Expect me to believe a man vanished like a wisp of smoke? He slipped out of the room, right past you so-called policemen, that's what he did. I saw him myself!" shouted Botts, who had seen nothing of the kind.

"Well, what are you standing there for?" Botts demanded. "He's probably walking out of the building this minute." The banker banged a meaty fist on the top of the desk. "Get busy, do you hear? I want action, not talk about disappearing men! Now by thunder, clear out of here and find Oscar Doolittle!"

Oscar Doolittle at the time was standing not six feet from the wrathful Mr. Botts. The two policemen, looking rather dazed, backed out of the room and pounded off down the corridor. In a minute or so the alarm was sounding throughout the building.

"That'll fix him," declared Botts. "Can't say as I'm not a little disappointed, though. Didn't think Doolittle was that type. But his attempt to escape leaves no doubt of his guilt."

Oscar stifled a groan. He could never clear himself now.

Mercer looked uneasy. "Are you sure you saw him leave, Phineas? I can't say that *I* did."

"Certainly I did," blustered Botts, who by now was certain that he *had* seen Oscar leave. "He ducked under the desk and slipped through the officers' legs." He chuckled heartily. "The old fox is getting along but he's still pretty sharp, eh, Mercer? Still sees a lot of things you youngbloods overlook."

"Maybe you're right," Mercer said dubiously. "I hope so, anyway," he added under his breath.

Botts turned and waddled importantly from Oscar's office, Mercer bringing up the rear.

Oscar Doolittle was left alone in his invisibility.

He sighed and slumped into his chair, buried his head in his hands. This was the last straw. Branded forever as a common thief! And no way to prove his innocence. It would have been difficult under normal circumstances, but now that he was invisible it was utterly hopeless, impossible.

But was it?

THE thought bounced into Oscar's brain quite of its own accord. He was invisible; he could escape; or he could search for evidence to prove himself not guilty. The mere thought was enough to fan the fires of hope that blazed in his heart.

Excited, he scrambled to his feet. He was convinced that Mercer was connected in some way with the disappearance of the bond.

If he shadowed Mercer— Any chance, no matter how slim, was worth taking.

His heart fluttering with hope, Oscar hurried from his office, ducked through the stream of people and headed for the lobby.

Seconds later, entering the lobby, he saw clusters of uniformed policemen guarding every exit. Phineas Q. Botts stood in the center of the floor, his feet planted wide like an angry bull, his

rumbling voice shouting orders to policemen, messengers and vice-presidents —anyone, in fact, that came within radius of the bellows.

Oscar spied Mercer talking earnestly to Ann Meade in front of the tellers' cages. Dodging the traffic, he scurried across the floor until he stood directly behind Mercer's broad back.

"I'm doing all I can for Oscar," Mercer was saying smoothly. "But it looks like an open and shut case against him."

Oscar felt a swift, hot surge of anger. Mercer, the lying hypocrite, was attempting to get in solid with Ann, by pretending to be helping him.

"I don't believe he did it," Ann returned stoutly. "He may be a timid, helpless creature, but he's not a thief."

"Certainly not," Mercer said heartily. "I like Oscar and I'm proud to call him my friend."

"He *was* a nice little fellow," Ann said wistfully. "Even if he was so futile."

Mercer cleared his throat loudly. He could carry this thing too far.

"Ann, there's something I want to ask you," he said quickly. "The employees of the bank are holding their annual dance tonight and I want you to go with me." He added hastily as Ann looked indecisive. "We could probably get some more information about Oscar there."

"That will be wonderful," Ann said, smiling. "It was lovely of you to ask me, Lester." She glanced at her watch and gave a little cry of dismay. "Heavens, I'm late! I'll have to fly. 'Bye-'bye until tonight."

Mercer watched her out of sight, his face beaming smugly with the assurance of a man who has made a good impression and knows it.

Oscar walked around in front of Mercer, scratching his head. He was puzzled about what to do next. Suddenly he noticed Mercer start violently and turn pallid. He followed the direction of Mercer's eyes and saw a slim, stylishly furred brunette approaching. She smiled brightly, displaying dazzlingly white teeth, as she stopped in front of Mercer with a swish of her short pleated skirt.

"Hello, ducky," she said. "Didn't forget me, did you?"

"Celeste, I told you not to come here!" Mercer hissed. "This might spoil everything, you little fool."

He glanced over his shoulder, his eyes roving the interior of the bank fearfully. Finally he turned back to the girl.

"Luckily we haven't been seen. Follow me to my office. You can talk to me there."

He turned on his heel and strode off. Celeste shrugged her slim shoulders and strolled after him at a more languid pace.

Oscar dogged her steps. Some instinct warned him that she was connected in some way with the disappearance of the twenty-five thousand dollar bond. In spite of her glamorous appearance, she looked as cold and business-like as a pearl-handled revolver.

With pulses hammering excitedly, Oscar followed her eagerly. It was his first experience at amateur sleuthing, and to his surprise he found himself enjoying it.

CHAPTER IV

In Durance Vile

LESTER MERCER was pacing the floor of his sumptuously appointed office when they entered. Celeste opened the door, but before she closed it Oscar had slipped in as unheralded as a well-behaved ghost.

"What is it you want?" Mercer burst

out. "You took a chance on spoiling the whole game by coming here."

"First of all," Celeste said coolly, "did you get the bond?"

Oscar started violently as the import of these words crashed into his brain. His suspicions had been correct! Mercer *was* the culprit!

"Quiet, you little fool!" Mercer hissed at Celeste. "Suppose someone overheard you. Certainly I have it. But I wasn't able to slip out and give it to you as we planned. We had a little slip-up here."

"Slip-up?" There was an anxious edge to Celeste's voice.

"Yes. The little dope we pinned this job on managed to escape. I still don't know how he did it. Anyway, it created a lot of excitement and if I had left then, it would have looked rather suspicious."

"Well, give it to me now," Celeste told him. "I can slip out of here without being searched."

Mercer stuck a hand into his inside coat pocket.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "I'll give it to you; and then for Pete's sake, clear out of here."

Oscar trembled with excitement as Mercer's hand emerged from his pocket holding an oblong piece of crisp, gilt-edged paper. The missing bond! Oscar wavered indecisively. Should he make a desperate lunge for the bond, the evidence that would clear him of any possible guilt? He knew that if Celeste got her hands on that gilt-edged certificate, left the bank with it, his last chance would go glimmering. He tensed himself, determined to risk everything on one frantic gamble.

Mercer was extending the bond, Celeste's slim hand was reaching greedily for it. . . .

Oscar crouched, gathering his muscles—and then the door banged open and the hearty voice of Phineas Q. Botts boomed through the room.

"Been looking for you, Mercer. Thought I might find you here."

Mercer wheeled toward the door, stuffing the incriminating paper into his trouser pocket as he faced his employer.

Oscar's shoulders sagged dispiritedly. His moment for vindication was gone. Anything could happen now.

Botts looked from Mercer to Celeste.

"Not interrupting anything, I hope?" he rumbled jovially.

"Not at all," Mercer said hastily. "As a matter of fact, Miss—er—Miss Summers was just going."

"That's right," Celeste smiled coyly. "I simply have to dash off." She turned slightly to look straight at Mercer. "It's a pity you didn't have that snapshot with you," she murmured. "Perhaps I can arrange to see you tonight and pick it up. I'm *so* anxious to have it!"

"Excellent idea," Mercer agreed quickly. "The bank employees are holding their dance tonight at the Grande Arms Hotel. If you could arrange to meet me in the lobby I'll have it for you then."

"You can expect me," murmured Celeste, "at nine. There's a sentimental value to that particular snapshot—and I wouldn't like anything to happen to it."

SHE turned, her bright smile turned incandescently on the portly personage of Mr. Botts, and swished enticingly from the room.

"Lovely creature," Botts breathed gustily. "Charming! Reminds me of a girl I knew once in France. I was younger then, but—"

Botts broke off suddenly, coughing in embarrassment.

"As I was saying," he rumbled on, "we can't find hide nor hair of this fellow Doolittle. He's not in the building;

there's not a trace of him anywhere."

Oscar felt a comfortable glow warming him. He was safe, secure at last! Why, he could walk right out of the bank this minute and nobody would be the wiser. Along with this feeling of security came a sudden rush of confidence. He wouldn't run like a scared chicken. No, sir, he'd stick.

Mercer had the bond. He'd follow Mercer until an opportunity presented itself to grab the precious paper. With this evidence he could clear himself. For the first time that day, Oscar's course of action seemed simple and uncomplicated—

And then suddenly the smug, complacent smile that adorned his invisible features was wiped away by a horrible noise—the strange buzzing noise that accompanied his miraculous transformations.

In a few seconds he would be visible again. Goodness, this was terrible!

In fact, it was positively catastrophic. Because Phineas Q. Botts and Lester Mercer showed no signs of leaving the room. Mercer was trying to get on the good side of his boss, always a splendid idea if it isn't done too obviously.

"Ahem!" Mercer coughed. "I didn't recall that you had been in France, sir." He winked slyly. The two policemen, sensing the drift of things, stood around grinning.

Botts' pink-jowled face colored pinker, but he took the innuendo in good stride.

"Ah yes, Mercer. Lovely country, France, lovely country! Before the Nazis got hold of it, of course. Why, I was only a young man when my father sent me to Paris before the World War to—er—paint. Ah yes, great artists, those Parisians, great artists! Good red wine, attractive—harrumph!—young ladies—" Botts fairly glowed at the reminiscence.

"I trust, sir, that you did considerable painting," Mercer said with a Grandpa-you're-an-old-devil grin.

"Paris has never been the same since," Botts breathed in a gust of frankness. Then he remembered what he had said, and blushed furiously.

Meanwhile, Oscar's bovine eyes were flying frantically around the room, searching desperately for a place of concealment. They lighted on the huge desk that stood in the center of the room. He moved quickly—but even as he took the first steps, he knew he was too late.

For it had happened again. Oscar was suddenly as plain as a light snapped on in a dark room. Every inch of his unprepossessing body became as glaringly obvious as the Lindbergh Beacon.

Phineas Q. Botts spotted him first.

"There he is!" he shouted. "Grab him!"

Botts obeyed his own command by lunging across the room, crashing into Oscar's slight form. His fat arms wrapped around the wasp-like waist and his booming voice roared into Oscar's ears.

OSCAR felt a pair of strong hands on his arms. A bulky uniformed figure loomed before him. There was a metallic click as handcuffs were snapped around his thin wrists. Through the cloudy fog of hysteria that blanketed his brain, he could hear his own voice, shrill and incoherent, pleading his innocence.

"How did he get in here?" Mercer said wonderingly. "It's incredible, amazing!"

"Nonsense!" bleated Botts triumphantly. "I saw him as he slipped in the door. They have to get up mighty early in the morning to steal a march on Phineas Botts!"

"You've got to listen!" Oscar began

to plead hysterically. "I've been framed! I'm innocent! But I know who the real thief is. You've *got* to believe me!"

"What's that?" Botts said instantly. "You know who the thief is? Well, speak up, man! Who is he?"

"I'll tell you!" Oscar panted.

He shook himself free from the clutch of the policeman and advanced belligerently toward Lester Mercer.

"There's the real thief!" he shouted, pointing both manacled fists at the efficiency expert. "He's got the bond on him right now! Search him," Oscar concluded triumphantly, "and see whether or not I'm telling the truth!"

Mercer licked his lips as all eyes in the room focused on him. He looked nervously about, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"That's absurd!" he protested weakly. "The man's insane. Take him away before he goes berserk and hurts somebody."

"Now just a moment, Lester," Botts interposed. "Seems to me we ought to give Oscar every chance to clear himself. If you have nothing to fear, you shouldn't object to being searched."

"I don't," Mercer gasped nervously. "It's only that . . ."

"He's stalling," Oscar cut in. "He's got the bond on him. He *knows* he's guilty!" he added confidently.

Oscar folded his arms nonchalantly as the policemen, at a nod from Botts, started toward Mercer. It was just then, as he was tasting the premature delights of vindication and vengeance, that the buzzing noise started again in his ears.

A look of horror soared over his features.

"No!" Oscar prayed desperately. "Not now, not now!"

But despite his pleas, the buzzing sound grew in volume and Oscar knew that in another instant, the inexorable transformation would occur. He gazed wildly about him and his eyes lighted on the desk. With a speed born of desperation, he lunged across the office to the haven it presented.

"After him!" shouted Mercer, taking immediate advantage of Oscar's break. "He's trying to escape! There's your guilty man!"

Mercer, Botts and the policemen wheeled with these words and raced to the desk under which Oscar had disappeared.

"I'll get him!" Mercer cried. He dropped to his knees and peered under the desk. The triumphant shout died on his lips and an incredulous, baffled look passed over his face. When he straightened up and climbed groggily to his feet, his face was pale.

"He's not there!" he gasped. "He's gone. He got away."

These words fell on Oscar's despairing soul like rain on parched ground. There was still hope for him! If he could remain invisible long enough to escape, there was still a chance to prove his innocence. He crouched under the desk, hardly daring to breathe, listening to Botts' angry voice.

"Are you going crazy?" Botts was shouting. "I *saw* him dart under this desk myself, and there's no human way that he could get out. Are you trying to tell me my eyes are lying?"

IT was at that crucial moment that a stray particle of dust drifted upward into Oscar's nose. It selected a soft spot on the tender membrane and proceeded to raise hell. Oscar's eyes began to water. Frenziedly, he clapped both hands over his mouth and nose. But it was no use, for nature suddenly ejected the offending bit of dust—with a loud, snorting sneeze.

"Hear that?" stormed Botts excited-

ly. "He's under there, all right. I'll drag him out myself!"

The sneeze had done more than merely betray Oscar's position to the enemy. It had also heralded the sound of a slow, horrifying buzzing in Oscar's ears. Gripped by terror and impending doom, Oscar shuddered as his body suddenly became visible again—at the precise second that Phineas Q. Botts' moonlike face stared in at him.

Botts' full-throated bellow sounded like the baying of a bloodhound.

"Hah," he bayed, "hah!"

Despite Oscar's desperate struggles Botts managed to secure a grip on one of his thrashing ankles. Then, puffing and blowing triumphantly, he dragged him forth into the circle of grim, unfriendly faces.

"Please," Oscar moaned piteously from his humiliating position, "I can explain everything. You've *got* to listen!"

"That's what he said before," Mercer sneered. "It's just another trick to try an escape."

"He won't get another chance," Botts puffed. "Grab him," he barked at the hovering policemen, "and see that he doesn't get away this time."

Bewildered and gasping, Oscar was jerked to his beanstalk feet and dragged to the door by the two burly cops. With a supreme effort, he twisted to face Mercer.

"There's the real thief!" Oscar shrieked. "I've got proof . . ."

The sentence was cut short as he was jerked through the doorway by the impatient policemen.

CHAPTER V

Oscar's Fatal Plunge

SEVERAL hours later, Oscar stared moodily through the barred windows of his cell, his mind a hopeless cesspool of despair. It was eight o'clock. In another hour Mercer would slip the bond to Celeste and she would vanish forever. With her would go Oscar's last and lone chance of ever clearing himself.

With a shuddery sigh he collapsed on the narrow cot and buried his head in his hands. He remained in this position for several minutes and then he raised his head, listening.

An unmistakably familiar sound was buzzing in his ears. Oscar was not surprised. That elusive quality in his soul that provided surprise for him had taken too much of a beating in the last twelve hours.

With a moody, jaundiced eye he watched his body disappear for the third time that day.

"So what?" he muttered bitterly.

He sat there on the edge of the bunk, frowning at the floor. Unconsciously his hand found a tin water cup that was lying on the cold stones. Absent-mindedly he began to tap the cup gently against the iron frame of the cot, keeping a doleful accompaniment to his gloomy thoughts. As he thought of Mercer holding Ann Meade in his arms, swaying to smooth music, Oscar's tempo and temper increased until he was pounding out a miniature facsimile of the "Anvil Chorus."

"Cut that racket in there!" a heavy voice shouted. "What do you think this is, a steel foundry?"

Oscar stopped guiltily as other voices joined the protest. He heard the footsteps of the guard pounding in his direction.

"It's Doolittle," he heard the jailer say. "I'll fix that little twerp so he don't feel so gay."

Oscar paled. He thought of crawling under the bed but he knew it would do no good. He was in for it, all right. He stared helplessly about—and then

he smiled. A malicious, cunning smile spread across his face as he looked down at his still invisible body and recalled that to all intents and purposes, he had vanished.

"I've been pushed around all day," he muttered. "It's about my turn now."

The guard, a large, glowering young man, appeared suddenly before Oscar's cell.

"Cut that rumpus," he growled. "Or I'll—"

He broke off, the words fading on his lips as he peered incredulously into the empty cell. He shook the door, tried the lock, his face a ludicrous mask of painful amazement. And then, as if realizing for the first time what had happened, he sprang into action.

"Escape!" he bawled. "The guy from the bank broke loose! Send out the alarm!"

Oscar had a slight pang of remorse as he heard this. His nervousness increased as he caught shouted questions, footsteps pounding along the old stone floors. He hadn't planned to escape. Nothing that daring had occurred to him. Still—why not?

The guard stuck a key in the lock, swung the door open and stepped into the cell. Oscar cringed away from him and then, his heart threatening to pop from his mouth, he edged past the man's burly form and crept into the corridor.

His lips twisted in a peculiar smile as he looked back at the guard standing perplexedly in the middle of the cell, his back to the door. Very gently Oscar swung the cell door shut. Stifling the laughter that bubbled up in his throat, he turned the key in the lock and then tossed the ring of keys into the middle of the corridor.

THEY fell with a metallic jangle. The guard wheeled about, his face mirroring rage, amazement and a half dozen other emotions too difficult to classify. He lunged at the door, gripping the bars in ham-like fists.

"Help!" he bellowed. "Lemme out o' here! I been tricked! They jumped me from behind."

He lapsed off at that point into a stream of highly imaginative and picturesque profanity that surpassed anything Oscar had heard since he eavesdropped on a faculty meeting in high school.

He listened with wistful admiration until he heard footsteps pounding in his direction. Looking up, he saw a half-dozen guards racing toward the cell that housed the bellowing jailer. Retreat, Oscar decided, was the strategic move. Turning, he scurried away in the opposite direction, his invisible features set in a grim, determined mask.

He had no clear idea of what he was going to do, but he knew that he must recover the bond before Mercer passed it on to his slinky accomplice, Celeste.

If he failed he would be branded forever as a thief and a criminal. With this thought bolstering his courage, Oscar crept down the corridor toward the door, beyond which lay freedom. His destination — the bank employee's dance at the Grande Arms Hotel.

OSCAR hesitated in the lobby of the Grande Arms Hotel, his determination wavering in the face of its imposing splendor and dignity. Throngs of formally attired couples surged past him, their faces mirroring the anticipated delights of the gala evening. From the ballroom adjoining the lobby, the strains of smooth, sophisticated music could be heard, inviting the revelers to romance and gaiety.

Everyone but the nervous, invisible figure crouched forlornly in the middle of the lobby was unhappy.

Oscar recognized with envy his fel-

low employees sauntering through the lobby, their dates clinging to their arms, drinking in the pearls of wisdom that dropped glibly from masculine lips. Oscar even had a glimpse of Phineas Botts, resplendent in white tie and topper, striding through the lobby, waving genially to his employees.

Botts' wife, a sharp-looking, middle-aged woman, who somehow gave the impression of being freshly lacquered, marched beside him, obviously proud of her position.

"There goes Mrs. Astor's horse," Oscar heard an underpaid clerk snicker.

"Looks to me like she's been having too many oats," his girl friend agreed in a stage whisper.

Oscar was mildly horrified at such impertinence, but there was nothing he could say about it at the moment. His invisibility was the important thing now. Besides, Mrs. Botts did look somewhat overstuffed. Oscar wondered vaguely if she wouldn't be useful at a picnic where there weren't any benches around to sit on. . .

He saw something then that made him forget his thoughts, jerked him to attention.

Through the arched doorway that led to the ballroom, Oscar saw Lester Mercer whispering to Celeste, saw him hand her something quickly, surreptitiously.

He was too late!

The horrible thought burst upon him, blowing away his caution like a straw in a gale. He ran toward the ballroom, toward Mercer and Celeste, leaving a breeze in his wake that rustled the taffeta skirts he passed.

WHEN Oscar entered the brilliantly lighted ballroom, Mercer and Celeste were separating, walking off in opposite directions. Oscar wavered, torn by indecision. Which one to follow? He hesitated frantically until he remembered that Mercer had slipped something to Celeste. What else could it have been but the bond? Even as this thought came to him he was hurrying excitedly after Celeste.

The rambunctious b r u n e t t e was dressed—or rather undressed—in a breathtaking number of flaming red as easy to distinguish in the crowd as a lighted torch. Oscar followed, hope blazing in his heart, until he realized with paralyzing, icy horror that Celeste was headed toward a cream-colored door, which was opening and closing continually as women streamed in and out.

His stricken eyes read the neat sign lettered on the paneling—Women's Powder Room.

Oscar stopped, aghast. He realized despairingly that he was beaten, for Celeste's red dress had already disappeared into those sacred precints.

The mere thought of following her turned his blood to a stream of ice water, started him trembling uncontrollably. Miserably he hovered about the entrance to the powder room. He would have to wait.

But what if Celeste passed the bond on to another conspirator—one whom Oscar didn't know—and that party left the dance? His last chance would be gone. The thought fired him with a frenzied, desperate courage. He *must* follow Celeste beyond these portals of doom.

He moved closer to the door, his heart thumping against his ribs. The door opened suddenly as two women emerged. Oscar's chance had arrived. He took a step—and then his courage melted like ice on an August day. He couldn't do it. His spirit quailed and his brow became feverish at the mere thought of invading that sanctum of inviolate femininity.

But underneath Oscar's timid exterior lay stern, gritty stuff.

It rallied to his aid now, forced his unwilling feet to carry him to the door, to wait another chance.

It came almost immediately. The sacred portals swung open, displaying long mirrors, cushioned benches and women, women by the dozen. Oscar took a deep breath and shuffled his feet nervously, like a sprinter preparing for the hundred yard dash.

"May the best man win," he whispered to himself; and then with a slithering motion of his hips, he slipped through the door into the outer lounge of the Chamber of Horrors.

It was a utterly new experience for Oscar Doolittle. He looked about, fearful and uncertain, at the females standing in chattering groups; at the women, young and old seated before the gleaming mirrors, repairing school girl cheeks and droop-chinned features that were anything but romantic.

He spotted the beauteous Celeste instantly. The burnished brunette had just deposited her purse on a long table and was moving with feline grace to an unoccupied seat in front of a mirror.

Oscar's eyes riveted on the velvet purse, the purse that contained the precious bond, his passport to vindication. He moved cautiously through the scads of women, his eyes centered on the purse. As he circled around the port side of a hefty dowager, his eyes lifted and he saw Ann talking to another girl.

Ann, lovely and beautiful, was wearing a frilly something or other that made her look like a visitor from heaven. Oscar stood still, gazing impassionedly at her while a lump crawled up his throat.

He had lost her. Lost her to that scheming crook, Lester Mercer. A hot flash of anger seared him, redoubling his determination to expose the efficiency expert, prove his own innocence. He had to, he must, if only for Ann's sake!

Oscar was close to the purse now, so close that he could reach out and touch it. His trembling fingers felt as clumsy as bananas as he tried to unsnap the tiny silver clasp that guarded the contents of the bag.

FINALLY it opened—and Oscar's fluttery fingers probed into the interior, met crisp, smooth paper.

He had succeeded! The thought fired him like a strong elixir. Exultingly he prepared to remove the bond, his brain racing ahead of him with triumphant visions of Mercer's consternation when the previous paper was returned.

And then his hand began to tremble. Nervelessly it fell from the purse, as his whole being was swamped with stark, icy terror.

"No!" Oscar gasped, "Not here! Not again!"

But this protestations were futile. For in his ears, faintly at first, and then with increasing volume, was booming the sound that heralded his return to visibility.

Oscar gazed about distractedly, panic and hysteria mounting in his breast. He would rather have stalked into a cageful of lions than face these women. Bereft of reason, stunned to the core of his soul, he could only stand helplessly by as his thin body suddenly resumed its normal condition and became visible.

He was not noticed immediately.

A fat matron to his right turned to him.

"Can I borrow your lipstick, dearie?" she asked sociably.

"I don't use it—" Oscar began, but it was as far as he got.

The woman's shrill, piercing scream ripped through his words, blitzkrieged through the room, shattering its comparative quiet. Women wheeled about, saw Oscar, and began shrieking. They

crowded back from him, their cries of terror crescendoing into an unbelievable clamor as their imaginations began to work overtime.

Oscar threw wide his arms in a gesture of entreaty.

"Please," he shouted above the din, "please listen to me."

"He's mad!" a woman screamed. "Just look at him!"

"A moron!" another yelped hopefully.

Pandemonium took charge. Pandemonium that would have paled into insignificance a 4-11 fire.

Women fled screaming. They fought and struggled as they forced their way out the small door, their voices shrill and hysterical.

It was worse than a shirt sale at a bargain counter!

Oscar cowered numbly against the wall, unable to move or speak. The last woman fled through the door. No —one remained. One who stepped quickly to the door, turned the key, locking it.

The girl turned and Oscar uttered a surprised squawk.

"Ann!" It was all he could think of.

"Don't 'Ann' me," she said grimly. She glared at him, hands on her hips, an incongruously business-like position for a lovely girl in a French gown.

"How did you manage to break out of jail?" she asked, and before he could answer she rushed on. "Have you gone mad, Oscar Doolittle? Stealing that bond, breaking jail, and now sneaking in here like a despicable Peeping Tom!"

"Ann, you don't understand!" Oscar cried desperately. "I—" He broke off as a furious banging started on the door.

"Ooooh," he moaned, "oooooh!"

Ann looked about quickly, her manner brisk, decisive.

"Oscar," she whispered, pointing to a small door on the far side of the room. "Quick, maybe you can get away through there. I . . . I" her voice was suddenly uneven, "I can't turn you over to them no matter what you've done."

Oscar hesitated, but as the outer portal trembled under a renewed assault, he turned like a startled fawn. With a last frightened glance over his shoulder, Oscar Doolittle bolted through the other door, jerking it shut behind him.

He stood trembling, enveloped in the stygian blackness of a corridor. Suddenly from the room which he had just vacated, he heard a rending crash and then masculine voices shouting threats and curses.

CHAPTER VI

True Confession

WITH the hounds of terror nipping at his heels Oscar fled through the dark corridor, his breath rasping his throat in shuddering gasps. His heart thumped wildly against his ribs, filling his ears with a roaring river of sound. Hysterically and blindly he dashed ahead, oblivious to all else but the mad impulse of a soul in torment—flight.

But within twenty feet his headlong scramble was rudely checked by a painfully solid door. He staggered back, and then his fingers were fumbling for the doorknob. A split second later he was stumbling into another room.

It was lighted; and when his eyes focused to the sudden illumination he looked around—and froze to panic-stricken immobility.

The room was occupied. Standing in its very center, gazing straight toward him, was Lester Mercer.

Oscar quailed. But then the realization that he was facing the man responsible for his present predicament put new steel in his backbone. A fran-

tic accusation sprang to his lips—but Mercer's next move so astounded him that his mouth opened and closed wordlessly.

Mercer was staring at the open door behind Oscar.

"Must've been the wind," Oscar heard him mutter. "Nobody there." Mercer strode past Oscar to the door, slammed it shut.

It was then Oscar realized what had happened. He stared helplessly down at his body, invisible again. He recalled the buzzing noise that he heard as he fled through the dark corridor. His body had vanished again during that mad flight.

Mercer had turned now and was walking toward another door, one that led evidently to the ballroom. It came as a surprise to Oscar that his own legs were moving, carrying him swiftly after Mercer. Without design or conscious volition he was slipping in front of Mercer, hurrying to the door. His hand reached out, twisted the key. The tumblers fell with a dry, metallic click.

Mercer stopped abruptly and peered at the lock.

"I'll swear I heard. . ."

His voice choked, his mouth dropped foolishly. For before his stunned eyes the key to the door was emerging from the keyhole. A whimpering noise sounded in Mercer's throat as the key floated across the room toward the open window. He watched glassily as the key passed through the window, then suddenly dropped from sight as it fell to the street below.

"I need a drink," Mercer moaned shakily. "I need a whole damn bottle. I think I'd better get pie-eyed."

"But you're not going to."

Oscar's voice, grim and invisible, sounded to the left of the efficiency expert. Mercer wheeled, eyes popping.

"Who said that?" he demanded frantically. "What kind of a joke is this? Who are you?"

"Your number is up, Mercer." Oscar tried to make his words sound ominous. "I want the stolen bond and a signed confession, or I'll beat the living tar out of you."

Mercer listened as a gleam of recognition dawned on his face.

"So it's you, Doolittle," he sneered. "You can't bluff me with some ventriloquism trick!" His eyes swept around the room. "You're hiding in here somewhere, trembling in your shoes. Come out and fight like a man or I'll come after you and drag you out!"

"All right," said Oscar. "You asked for it. Put up your hands and defend yourself."

HE would have rather shouted "en garde!" as he had heard it done once in a movie, but he wasn't sure how to pronounce it.

"En garde, then!" shouted Mercer, who did. "Show yourself and get ready for a beating."

He assumed a classic pose, left arm and foot extending, right arm cocked under his chin, weight balance on the balls of his toes.

"I did a bit of this in college," Mercer said grimly as he circled slowly, waiting for his opponent to appear.

Oscar stepped around in back of Mercer, a malicious smile twisting his lips. He rubbed his hands together in gleeful anticipation and drew a bead on Mercer's plump posterior anatomy. His foot drew back like a pendulum, stopped, and then swung down and up, describing a swift, vicious arc. Behind Oscar's swishing foot traveled all of his accumulated anger, all of the ignominy and shame he had received at the hands of Lester Mercer.

It was a bull's-eye.

Mercer jumped a foot in the air, a

pained howl tearing from his throat. His hands clasped the seat of his pants as he pranced about, his screams filling the air.

"Where are you?" he shouted. "Fight like a man!"

But in his eyes as he glared about the room, fear and doubt were gleaming.

"All right," said Oscar, "I will fight like a man."

He stepped in close to Mercer. His right fist lashed out, drove between Mercer's guard, sank into Mercer's paunchy stomach.

Mercer gasped and doubled up, his face turning a peculiar shade of green. All of his assurance dissolved before Oscar's invisible onslaught.

"Don't hit me!" he cried weakly. "Don't hit me again!"

"Will you confess stealing that bond?" Oscar demanded.

Mercer rallied desperately. "You're mistaken, Doolittle. I don't know anything about that check," he moaned. "I haven't the faintest idea—"

Fists, hard invisible fists, battered into Mercer's face like an attacking swarm of hornets, starting a trickle of blood from his mouth and nose, driving him to his knees.

"Don't lie to me!" Oscar panted, "Now, what about that confession?"

Mercer collapsed on his face, his fingers clawing frantically at the floor.

"Keep away from me!" he shouted hoarsely. "Keep away from me, you damned ghost!"

His voice rose to a babbling, hysterical scream.

"I stole the bond! I stole the bond, got it away. Framed you. Bribed a guard."

The words poured out in a frenzied scream, blasting through the room, filling it with their wild sound . . .

"Open this door!" Oscar started, turned to the door. The words were followed by a furious banging that rattled the portal violently. "Open up in there or we'll smash this door down!"

Oscar looked about helplessly. He had his confession, but what good would it do him? Already shoulders were slamming into the door, cracks were splintering in its surface. But then a hopeful, anticipatory smile creased Oscar Doolittle's invisible features. For as the door sagged inward, he heard the strange buzzing noise humming in his ears . . .

POLICEMEN, bank employees poured into the room. Behind them stormed the pot-bellied, shouting figure of Phineas Q. Botts.

"What's going on here?" he shouted. He elbowed through, stopped when he saw Oscar.

"There's your man!" he bellowed at the policemen. "Grab him! He's dangerous!"

"Hold your horses," Oscar snapped, as a minion of the law started for him. "If you want the real thief, there's your man." He pointed down at the prone figure of the efficiency expert. "He's just confessed to me."

"Impossible!" snorted Botts. "That's Mercer, my right-hand man. Expect us to believe another lie like that, Doolittle?"

"It's true," Oscar said firmly. "Mercer stole the bond, arranged things to look as if I were the thief."

"Nonsense!" bellowed Botts. "Incredible!"

"You stupid blockhead!" shouted Oscar. "You can't see any farther than the nose on your face!" The words ripped out of their own accord, startling Oscar as much as they did his boss.

"Well," Botts said truculently, "have you any proof?"

"Watch," said Oscar. "Just watch."

He bent, shook Mercer's shoulder.

"Tell Botts that you stole that bond, Mercer," Oscar said harshly. "Tell him that you framed me—me, Oscar Doolittle."

At the mention of the name, Mercer's body jerked convulsively.

"For God's sake, leave me alone," he moaned. "I'll confess everything. I stole the bond, bribed a guard, framed you." His voice rose to a babbling shriek. "Get away from me, leave me alone!"

Oscar straightened up determinedly. "Satisfied?" he asked Botts.

Botts sputtered, for once in his life incapable of speech.

The two policemen jerked Mercer to his feet. His eyes widened dazedly as he saw Oscar, now very much in the flesh.

"It was a trick," he burst out savagely. "Well, you've got me but you'll never get the bond!"

"Bond?" echoed Botts blankly. Then his face reddened. "Look here, now, we've got to have that bond! Can't send you to prison without it. It's the same as—as—" he groped for a word—"as the corpus delicti. Yes, that's it—*corpus delicti.*"

He bellowed the Latin phrase with obvious relish.

"Can't hang a man without a body!" thundered Phineas Botts, who by now was completely confused. "Same things with bonds! Can't do a thing without the bond. *Corpus delicti.*"

"Well, you'll never see that bond again," snapped Mercer.

"Don't be too sure about that," a feminine voice warned him.

Oscar and Phineas Q. Botts wheeled simultaneously, almost colliding as they turned to stare at the doorway, in the direction of the voice.

Ann Meade was standing there. Ann, a pleasant smile on her face, holding the gilt-edged bond in one slender hand!

"Holy smokes!" Oscar said inadequately. "If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't believe it."

Botts waddled across the room, snatched the bond from Ann's hand and examined it eagerly. His round face flushed happily. He seized Ann suddenly and planted a hearty kiss square on her lips.

"Perfect, my dear," he wheezed, "perfect!"

Whether he referred to the check or the kiss was doubtful. Botts himself couldn't tell.

"But how," stammered Oscar, "did you manage. . ."

"SIMPLE deduction," Ann cut in. "One, I knew that you must have been looking for something in the powder room. Two, when a slinky brunette came rushing out, screaming for her purse, I had a hunch that she had what you were looking for. Anyway, I followed her. To make a long story short, I got the bond and Celeste is now locked up in the mop closet outside the powder room."

"Perfect again," wheezed Botts. "I had it figured somewhat like that myself." He turned to the policemen. "Get the girl and take 'em both to jail. Ha, ha," he rumbled, "old Phineas is still pretty sharp, eh, Mercer?"

"Corpus delicti," sneered Mercer. "Bah!"

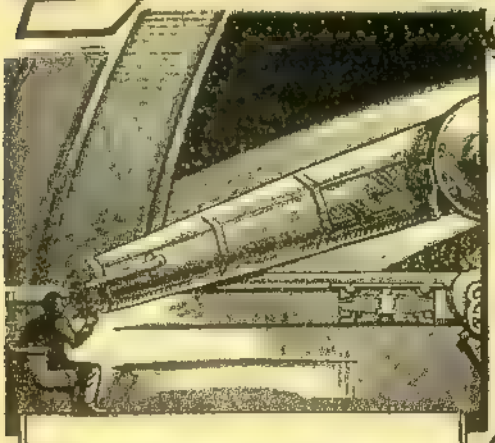
Oscar took a deep, happy breath as Mercer was dragged from the room. With him he hoped went his own troubles.

"Had my eye on that fellow for some time," Botts was saying loudly. "He's got a fishy eye, never did trust him. I was ready to spring a trap of my own, if you two hadn't—"

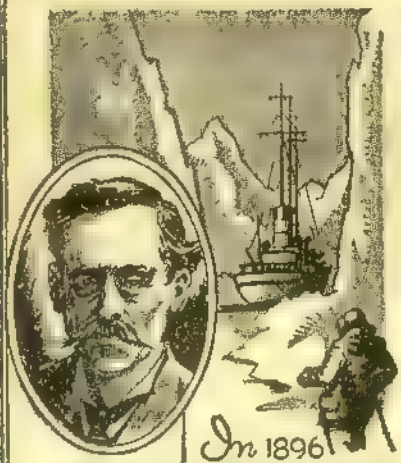
He stopped suddenly, noticing that Ann and Oscar were not listening very

(Continued on page 146)

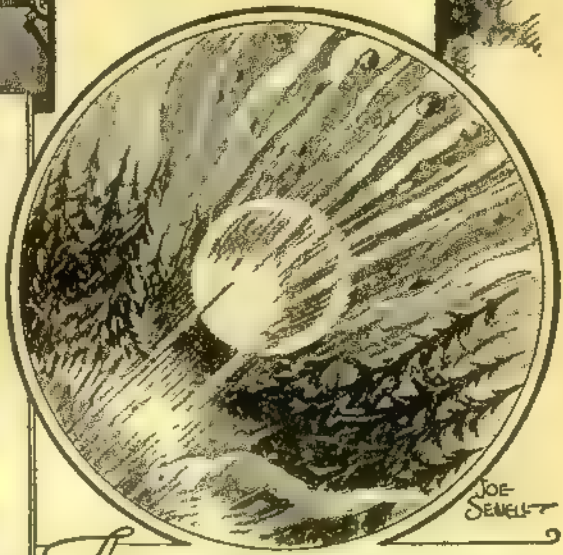
Scientific



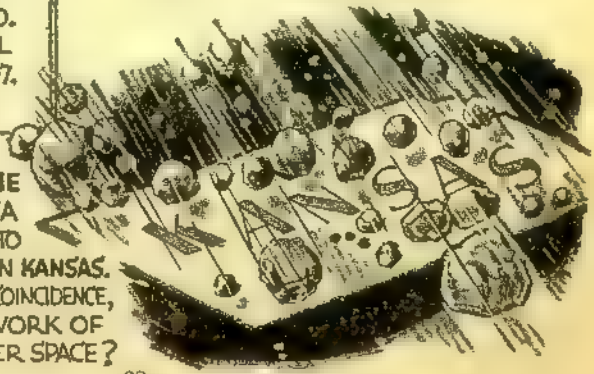
It has been estimated that between **FIFTEEN** and **TWENTY MILLION METEORS** enter the earth's atmosphere every 24 hours. A very insignificant few of which strike the earth itself . .



In 1896 commander **ROBERT E. PEARY** set out to bring back to New York the largest fragment of the **CAPE YORK, GREENLAND METEORITE** weighing around **70** tons. This attempt failed. However he was successful on his second attempt in 1897.



The great **METEOR** fall of **SIBERIA** in 1908 destroyed thousands of trees and completely annihilated a herd of 1500 reindeer. The fiery glow following the explosion was seen in the British Isles .



One **THIRD** of all known **STONE METEORITES** in North America and **ONE SIXTH** of all known to the entire world have landed in **KANSAS**. Is this unbelievable fact just coincidence, or might it suggest the work of intelligent beings from outer space?

BOMB SIGHT OF THE GODS

by JOSEPH J. MILLARD

LOOK skyward on any clear night and you won't have to wait long to witness one of science's most baffling and intriguing mysteries—the passage of a meteor through earth's upper atmosphere. If your interest happens to coincide with the so-called Leonid or Perseid showers in August, you may be treated to a celestial fireworks display reaching the extent of a hundred meteors an hour.

It has been estimated that somewhere from fifteen to twenty *million* meteors enter the earth's atmosphere every twenty-four hours but only an insignificant fraction of these last long enough to strike the earth itself. The remainder, being small, are completely consumed by the friction of their passage through upper atmosphere.

What, exactly, are meteors and where do they come from?

You may be surprised to learn that with all our scientific advancement, nobody knows for certain. There are at least four major hypothesis to account for the origin of meteors and each has its supporters.

Of course the majority accept the theory that these celestial bombs are pieces of comets, burst asunder by the pull of some star or planet in space. But every once in a while, meteors kick over the traces and do something that does not at all harmonize with even this theory. And there are still stranger mysteries than the origin of meteors to intrigue the human mind.

If an intelligent and malignant entity were hovering in space, bombing the earth with chunks of rock and iron, he could not do a better job of spotting his missiles.

By all the rules of all the theories of meteor origin the distribution of meteoric falls over the earth should be uniform over a period of time.

But it isn't!

In the first place, more falls are recorded for the months of January and April than for any other months of the year. May and June rank second in number of falls while March and July drop clear to the bottom of the list with the fewest recorded falls.

Also, contrary to general belief, almost ninety percent of all recorded falls occurred in the *daytime*. In North America, for example, only six of the known falls came during the hours of darkness.

But most amazing of all is the way in which these large meteorites select certain parts of our planet on which to fall. If some intelligent entity *is* hurling meteorites at us with a purpose, that entity has fairly accurate bomb sights with which to aim his missiles. For the regularity with which stones and iron strike certain areas is almost too much to leave to chance

ARE METEORITES AIMED?

About one hundred and seventy-five separate falls of iron meteorites have been located and studied in North America. This is almost as many as have been known in all the rest of the world put together. Has our continent been somehow singled out for a special bombardment of celestial iron?

But stranger still is the fact that most of this majority of iron fell within a comparatively small area in the southern Appalachian Mountains. But these are only the smaller irons. The really big bombs have a different objective.

With but one exception, all of the great iron meteorites exceeding a ton in weight that have fallen on the entire continent of North America, have fallen along a narrow strip that runs from Oregon down the middle line of the Rocky Mountains to Mexico. Irons found in this target ground range in weight from two thousand to sixty thousand pounds while within this area is the unexplored Meteor Crater of Arizona which probably contains a meteorite as big as all the others put together.

Two other spots on earth are smaller and less important targets for the heavenly *blitzkrieg*. There are unexplainable concentrations of iron falls at a spot in South Africa and another in northern Chile. The rest of the world may rest easily, for little bombing is directed at them by the master of the iron missiles.

But when we leave iron meteorites and turn to the stony type, we again find parts of our land used

as targets for celestial bombings.

For some unguessable reason, the gods must hate Kansas.

More stony meteorites strike that state than any other state in the union—more than any other *two* states west of the Mississippi River except Texas which is immensely larger.

Furthermore, one-third of all known falls of stony meteorites in North America landed in Kansas and one-sixth of all known to the entire world were hurled at her flat prairies. Of the rare type of meteorite known as Pallasite, two of the thirteen known to this continent struck Kansas and one of those was the largest Pallasite known to the world.

The largest stony meteorite in the world, so far as is known, fell in Kansas and the only instance in history where two separate falls occurred on the same farm took place on the farm of J. K. Freed in Scott County, Kansas. The largest number of falls actually witnessed in any state occurred in Kansas.

But, queerly, only two iron meteorites have ever been located in the state and one of these was so old as to be almost completely oxidized.

TWO DIFFERENT SOURCES?

Perhaps there are two fleets of celestial bombers—one using iron bombs, the other stone—and each has its own purpose and objective. That may sound like a bit of imaginative fantasy, but it is actually about as reasonable as any explanation science has been able to produce so far.

But if we are being bombed, our civilian population has so far escaped death at the hands of the bombers. To date, there is no record of a human being killed by the fall of a meteorite although a man was struck and injured by one in India and others have been stunned by the nearness of the fall or explosion.

A number of meteorites have actually fallen in cities and towns. One fell in Constantinople. On July 4th, 1917, a stone weighing a hundred and fifty pounds fell in the town of Colby, Wisconsin, and ten years later one fell in the village of Tilden, Illinois. At least eight times, falling meteorites have smashed through buildings.

A number have killed or injured animals and the great fall of Siberia in 1908 destroyed thousands of trees and completely destroyed a herd of fifteen hundred reindeer. The concussion following this massive fall was recorded half-way around the world and people as far away as the British Isles saw the fiery glow in the sky from the meteorite's explosion.

But suppose these visitors from space are not bombs at all but space ships, inhabited by intelligent beings and driven with intent toward preselected landing places. Of course meteorites do not resemble our ideas of what a space ship should look like, nor do they contain cabins for visible passengers. But there is no law that requires space ships to be of a definite shape, nor is there any evidence that beings from space would necessarily be visible or take the shape and form of men.

LIVING ORGANISMS?

Suppose, for a moment, that these space travellers are of a form absolutely unimaginable to us—perhaps no more than concentrated intelligent energy. As such, they might be invisible and undiscovered, yet nonetheless real.

If, many centuries ago, the first of these travelers reached earth and reported it habitable, it is natural that other travelers racing across space to join them would want to land near their friends. This might account for the concentration of meteorites in definite areas.

And it is just as reasonable to suppose that through accident, miscalculation or a sheer spirit of adventure, others of these entities might decide to break away from the herd and explore the rest of this new world. This would account for the smaller falls elsewhere on earth.

Space travelers like this would, naturally, sometimes travel in fleets. In 1913 a whole procession of fireballs traveling in somewhere around ten groups, with four to six members in each group, appeared over western Saskatchewan in Canada. This "space fleet" sped eastward across Canada, accompanied by rumblings and explosions that were heard for distances of twenty to seventy miles each side of their path. The earth shook to the thunder of their passage.

Growing nearer and brighter, the "fleet" left Canada and sailed eastward over the ocean. It was seen by a number of ships at sea and after a time it curved south and passed over the Bermudas which was the last time it was seen. Apparently the fleet either fell or landed in the ocean somewhere southeast of Bermuda.

More evidence that perhaps meteorites are inhabited by powerful entities is found in the experience of Commander Robert E. Peary who in 1896 set out to bring the largest fragment of the Cape York, Greenland, meteorite to New York.

This fragment, of immense size and an estimated weight of around seventy tons, was supposed by the Eskimos to be inhabited by Sarka, their devil, who caused bad weather. Before "Sarka" was finally put aboard ship and landed in New York, the sailors of Peary's crew were perfectly willing to admit that Sarka *did* inhabit the great iron in all his malignant power.

MYSTERIOUS ACCIDENTS

From the moment they started moving operations on the meteorite, every conceivable calamity attacked the party. Fierce storms, gales of wind and driving snow lasted every minute of the time. Heavy timbers and railroad rails used for transporting the fragment snapped and bent. The first trip ended in total failure.

In 1897, Peary returned with new equipment and once more disturbed the malignant being in the great iron. Again storms and calamities struck. When at last the meteorite was ready to be slid aboard, an unbelievable shift in wind caused a

premature ebb tide. Working at desperate speed, the crew accomplished the loading but had to chop away the ropes and timbers at the last moment to save the ship from the falling sea.

As they put about, a procession of huge icebergs sailed up to almost block their passage out to sea. In desperation, they rammed into the pan ice and began a dash for safety, racing directly between two massive bergs that were coming together to crush them.

They made it by a hair's breadth and the two bergs crashed together just astern, showering the vessel under tons of shattered ice. Safely outside, they set sail for home but ran into such violent wind that for fifty hours they had to ride in the lee of Walsenholm Island, keeping the engines at half-speed the entire time to hold their vessel from being swept back and wrecked on shore.

But at last the perseverance of Peary and his crew defeated the evil forces arrayed against them and the big meteorite was finally landed safely at its destination.

Such unbelievable happenings make us all wonder if, after all, our earth may not be in process of invasion by invisible beings from space. At least, such a supposition most easily accounts for the many weird and unbelievable occurrences reported so frequently.

And in the light of such explanation, the mysterious activities of meteorites seem almost logical.

☆ CLOUDS IN SPACE ☆

By MORRISON COLLADAY

LATE in January one of the European observatories announced that a giant sun in the Milky Way—the island universe to which the earth belongs—had exploded.

It was suggested later that one of the coldest winters ever known on earth may have been caused by this comparatively nearby catastrophe. Also that the magnetic storms of unprecedented intensity in April may have been a further effect.

The attitude of American astronomers on the subject of the exploding sun has been cautious. They admit that there appears to be a new star in the sky. If later observations bear out the first sensational reports, new light will be thrown on the nature of our own island universe. We now know surprisingly little about it, though we have every reason to believe it resembles the almost innumerable spiral nebulae scattered through the space which we can see through our telescopes.

For a number of reasons it is much more difficult to observe our own universe than those millions of light years away. The chief one is that we are a part of it. We know that all spiral nebulae have radiant blazing nuclei and so, we assume, has the one to which the earth belongs. Astronomers believe that this nucleus is situated somewhere in the constellation Sagittarius. The astonishing thing is that it is invisible to us on earth. Where it should be are only the normal number of stars. Now it has been discovered that behind these visible stars are great clouds of some unknown opaque substance.

Dr. Joel Stebbins, professor of astronomy at the University of Wisconsin, suggests that perhaps it is fortunate for us that these clouds exist. If they did not, the intensity of radiation from the nucleus might make life impossible on earth.

"Between the earth and the center of the universe," says Dr. Stebbins, "are some extremely hot stars a thousand times as bright as the sun, and measurements have been made of the light of these stars to determine the amount of light absorbed in the black clouds of space. The distance to the center of the universe in the constellation Sagittarius is estimated to be about 30,000 light years, but the intervening dark matter shows strong absorption at distances of three or four thousand light years, so that it is possible to see only a fraction of the distance to the center. In the Sagittarius area are great clouds of stars making it the most brilliant section of the sky. But the heart of the galaxy is hidden behind black clouds which lie beyond these visible clouds of stars. As the distance of the bright stars in front can be measured, the distance of the clouds which form a backdrop to them can be calculated."

A recent meeting of the American Philosophical Society heard from Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard Observatory, that he had found a hole in these black clouds through which he could see. This "window" is too far from the center to give any idea of the conditions there, but it enabled Dr. Shapley to observe that other island universes are scattered through that part of space on the far side of our universe with the same regularity as on our side.

According to Dr. Shapley, it was possible by measuring 147 variable stars appearing through this window in the black clouds, to calculate their distance from the earth. He found that forty-seven of them were between us and the window. One hundred were on the other side of our universe and we were looking at them through the window.

The density of the black clouds has been calculated. It is possible that some form of light beyond the visible spectrum may be discovered that can penetrate them. In that case the hidden heart of the universe could probably be photographed. —*Morrison Colladay.*

THREE WISE MEN OF SPACE

by DONALD BERN

Three voyagers from deep in space come to Earth, seeking a place to live in peace—and land amid a hell of Nazi dive bombers!

IT was Captain Ceti, peering through the small but powerful telescope of the slim space ship, who first saw the beautiful outlines of the small planet far away in space.

Captain Ceti's single great eye beamed happily, and the useless antenna sprouting from his immense forehead beat the air excitedly. Once, in the faded past, all the intelligent beings on Ceti's planet had conversed or communicated through such an antenna.

But that was long before speech had been invented, long before the planet Floros had become dried by the incessant, fierce heat of its large sun, and long before its decreasing population had been spurred to seek another world to inhabit.

Quickly, Captain Ceti gave orders to his two assistants. This took but a moment, for the Floros men possessed two sets of vocal cords and two tongues and could carry on two conversations at once.

"Eros," he commanded the larger assistant, "fire the repulse tubes and prepare to land within ten million miles!"

Meanwhile his other tongue said:

"Leo, send a message back to Floros that we have at last found a planet which appears habitable!"

His squat, dumpy Floros figure bent as he gazed once more through the telescope.

He reflected dreamily, "And the thousand-year search of our world to find another home can end in success . . . Leo, this planet is beautiful! I can see vast, green fertile fields, oceans, lakes, rivers! What a change from our dry world!"

Leo was at work sending the message of their happy discovery. The rays that left the transmitting apparatus traveled far faster than light rays * and would reach the home planet in a matter of months, Floros months, whereas radio waves or even electrical impulses would require countless years.

Tears welled from Leo's ball-like eye and ran down over his pudgy, single nostriled nose. Tears of gladness. What a prize this new planet would be!

How thankful the people of his world would be that a planet had been found to which they could migrate, and where

* Einstein's theory postulates that nothing can move faster than the speed of light. Therefore these strange other-world creatures must possess a knowledge of physics far beyond that encompassed by Dr. Einstein in his "Theory of Relativity"—Ed.

...ot drove the ship grimly upward ... he counted, "two—three . . ." and Nazi bombers crashed

they could live and bear their children without the ever-increasing hardship encountered on their own waterless globe!

Then a new though struck Leo and he turned to the awed Captain Ceti.

"Perhaps this sphere is overrun by hostile creatures!" he exclaimed worriedly. "What then?"

Eros broke in, scoffing: "Animals, perhaps, but probably not intelligent, and what is brute force next to our own weapon?"

He nodded his egg-shaped head toward the slender, almost delicate-looking ray-gun tube. Leo frowned.

"You have been too free with the ray gun," he declared. "On planet X236 you killed several intelligent plant life without cause."

"They attacked us!" Eros retorted. "But even so, I wanted to test the ray gun. And we lost nothing, since X236 had too rare an atmosphere to ever become the home of our people."

Leo's continued frown was evidence that this brutal reasoning bore no weight with him. But as they neared the blue, green and brown planet, the frown vanished to be replaced by a happy grin.

Already their apparatus had shown the planet to possess a breathable atmosphere. And the closer the space ship drew to the body, the more certain Leo became that here was a new world for the people of Floros.

"FIRE all forward repulse tubes," Captain Ceti ordered Eros after some time had passed.

Eros did as he was bidden and the slim space ship jarred its occupants at each terrific braking blast.

"Circle," said the fleshy captain, and Leo drew back the pilot stick.

The space ship left its straight course to move in a direction paralleling the surface of the sphere. Then they were closing in slowly, steadily, carefully. Captain Ceti put his eye to the telescope once more. Suddenly he gasped.

"Leo, Eros! This planet *is* inhabited! I can make out enormous dwellings and things moving!"

He moved aside to allow Leo to peer through the powerful lens. Leo moved the telescope over the surface of the globe, over its blue waters, its cities, fields.

"There is intelligence here," he said solemnly, gazing at boats on the oceans, at machines that flew through the air, and at vehicles that sped swiftly over the ground.

Eros elbowed him away from the telescope, put his own great eye to it. A second later he grunted:

"Intelligence, yes, but even that may be dangerous! These beings may become hostile to us."

"Or they may be friendly," Captain Ceti added.

The space ship circled about the planet, gradually braking now and drawing closer to the surface. Closer, closer, finally speeding over a vast expanse of ocean. Then suddenly, a large island was visible below.

"Landing speed!" the pudgy leader commanded, and the forward repulse tubes blasted once more.

Leo pulled a lever at the same instant as Ceti's second tongue rasped, "Wings!" and collapsible wings automatically spread out on either side of the space ship, converting it thereby into an airship, able to move with comparative slowness without falling.

An enormous city came into view. Captain Ceti pointed at a level space near the city.

"A landing field. Bring the ship down there," he ordered. The converted space ship swooped down.

Suddenly, the ship jarred roughly, spilling the Floros men from their seats. A loud impact numbed their ears as the space ship rocked wildly. Staggering, Leo reached for the pilot stick, pulled it back sharply. They rose swiftly.

"We're being shot at!" Eros exclaimed. "I saw their guns! They're hostile without knowing who we are or what we want. Let me give them a taste of the ray gun!"

He started toward the fore of the ship, where the ray gun was mounted.

"Wait," Leo protested, "help me with the pilot stick. Something is wrong with the control cable — jammed, I think!"

The other two plunged to help him. The space ship was losing altitude, coming once again into the firing range of the hostile creatures below. The very air about it seemed to be exploding.

AFTER a moment the Floros captain shook his egg-shaped cranium and spread wide the three fingers of his hands in a helpless gesture.

"Main cable stuck," he said. "They've got us. See if you can pancake her down gently, Leo."

The landing field was immediately below. Leo brought the ship's flat belly down on the smooth landing field. They came to an easy stop.

Eros was the first to see the tall, beastlike creatures that were approaching the space ship on long, powerful-looking legs. He gasped, paled in fright. Then the other two saw them.

"Six foot giants!" Ceti exclaimed.

From the average three-foot height of the men from Floros, six feet of height indeed appeared gigantic. These beastlike creatures had hair which covered the top of their small heads. They had two small eyes set in each side of their faces; they had two tiny nostrils instead of one large one.

But the most peculiar thing was that instead of being narrow at the top and wide in the middle, as were the bodies of the Floros men, these strange beings were top-heavy and small in the middle. They carried wood and metal sticks, and Leo guessed that these were weapons.

Eros fingered the ray gun nervously.

"Careful with it," Captain Ceti ordered. "We must make them our friends—if possible."

The ugly-looking inhabitants stopped at a distance of seven or eight feet from the space ship. Captain Ceti opened the porthole and bravely wiggled his squat Floros shape out to the open. Then he rose to his full three feet of height and regarded the tall creatures with fearless eyes.

A shocked, ludicrous expression appeared on the others' faces as they looked at the small figure before them.

Ceti cleared his throat.

"People of this beautiful world," he began, "you need have no fear of me or my comrades. We will not harm you. We come on a peaceful but desperate mission."

He halted, realizing his Floros speech was just gibberish to them.

Leo squirmed through the small porthole of the space ship. Then Eros followed, a pencil-size ray gun in his hand.

Suddenly, with a concerted move, the six-footers advanced on the Floros newcomers. Eros brought his ray gun up.

"Wait!" Leo shouted, and tried to knock down his arm. Too late! The trigger was released, a purple ray sprang from the slender tube and enveloped two of the advancing group. They twisted in sudden agony and dropped to the ground heavily.

One of the other creatures exclaimed something that sounded like "blimey!" and at the same instant, the three visi-

tors were pounced upon and thrown to the hard ground. Leo felt his senses fading. For a moment he fought the sensation, then he slumped unconscious.

THERE WAS a terrific ache in the narrow top of his head. Leo groaned aloud and opened his great eye. Finally, the spinning world came to a standstill and he perceived that he was lying on a cot in a cell.

On similar lengthy cots, Captain Ceti and Eros were just stirring to consciousness. In a little while they were both wide awake and sitting up dazedly.

Captain Ceti passed his three-fingered hand over his forehead with a pained gesture and gazed helplessly at his two men. His antenna drooped dismally. He frowned on the sullen Eros.

"You," he grated, "are the fault of this! They weren't going to harm us, but you killed two of them!"

"They attacked us first, didn't they?" Eros protested shrilly.

THEIR chubby leader swore fluently in the Floros language. Eros had been disagreeable, sullen and a trouble-maker from the beginning of the expedition.

Time passed; and then, as the sky was growing dark, bowls of food were handed the prisoners through the bars of the cell. Then some tall, bespectacled creature endeavored vainly to converse with them.

"He's a scientist of some sort, I think," Leo said.

The bespectacled being left them finally.

Then a whining, swelling shriek brought them tumbling to the cell's barred window. For some mysterious reason, large numbers of their immense captors were scurrying toward what appeared to be some underground shelters. Some were gazing anxiously at the sky as they ran. The whine swelled once more and faded away.

It was, had the Floros men known it, an air-raid alarm siren. And then through the eerie scream came the bass roar of many motors, mounting quickly to a deafening roar. Airships flew overhead in large numbers.

"There seems to be trouble," Captain Ceti commented.

His casual words were suddenly and almost dramatically verified. A series of terrific detonations split the air, vibrating the walls and breaking the cell window. The violent shock threw the prisoners to the cell floor in a tangle of arms, legs and antennae.

Captain Ceti staggered to his feet, ambled his squat shape to the window and looked up at the sky. He shook his fist as one of the attacking ships swooped low and dropped some of its explosive missiles.

"There must be a war going on," he groaned. "Just my luck to get mixed up in something like that!"

A violent, rocking blast burst upon them suddenly. A part of the prison wall dissolved amid the ear-racking detonation. One of the missiles had struck their prison direct!

"Let's get out of here!" Eros bleated.

They scrambled over the debris and crawled through the jagged gap in the wall. As Leo straightened, his large eye caught sight of the spaceship, still standing unmoved on the landing field. The field was a whirl of activity, as airship after airship took to the sky with a revengeful roar to engage the enemy craft above in deadly combat.

But still the explosive shells dropped, gouging craters in the once level ground.

"The space ship will be destroyed!" Leo gasped.

"This is our chance to escape!" Eros exclaimed.

The three tiny Floros men ran toward the space ship. The embattled defenders failed to notice them as they blanketed the darkening sky with an anti-aircraft barrage.

"Release the jammed control cable," Captain Ceti ordered, asserting himself as leader once more.

OBLIVIOUS to the fighting and death raging about him, Leo delved into the mechanisms of the space ship. For a moment Eros gave aid; then as an explosion nearby dug a hole in the ground.

"We'll be blown to bits!" he gasped. "I'm getting out of here!"

He started to run across the open field. An enemy plane swooped low directly above him. Eros ceased to exist.

"That's the end of him," Captain Ceti muttered bitterly, but because of the incessant tumult the busily working Leo did not hear him. Finally Leo's searching fingers found the cause of the jammed control, a fragment of anti-aircraft shell.

"They shot at the space ship, thinking it was an enemy machine," Leo reflected.

They wiggled inside the long tubular space ship just as a new formation of enemy craft zoomed over the field to be met by the alert anti-aircraft batteries. Captain Ceti sprang to the pilot stick, and in a flash the space ship left the ground.

Instantly it was surrounded by a whirling, fighting flight of enemy flying machines. Small pellets from rapidly firing weapons drummed against the space ship. Several whined through the open porthole.

Captain Ceti and Leo exchanged significant glances. Then the captain maneuvered the space ship to an advantageous position, as Leo grasped the slender tube of the ray gun and aimed at the peculiarly crossed marking of an enemy craft.

He released the trigger. The airship suddenly wilted, crumpling at the center. It began to spin downward like a wounded bird.

"One!" Captain Ceti counted grimly. He maneuvered to the tail of another enemy ship.

"Two!" he exclaimed a moment later. "Three, four, five, six, seven, eight—"

The attacking aircraft finally turned and fled toward their home base, greatly depleted in number. They had never fought a space ship before!

With a tired sigh, Leo turned from the ray gun. Things on this planet were not as he had hoped they would be. Captain Ceti was also depressed.

"What do we do next?" Leo asked.

Ceti increased the speed of the space ship and headed toward the coldness of outer space. After a short while, Leo pulled the collapsible wing lever and they idled through vast emptiness at seven miles a second. For a moment longer the captain was silent, his large forehead wrinkled in thought. Then he said:

"I'll dictate a message home."

Leo sat down at the transmitting apparatus.

People of Floros, I am sorry to report that the planet mentioned in my last message is not, after all, an ideal world—not just now, at least.

It is inhabited by hostile beings who shower explosive death on each other.

They are much the way we were in the distant past, and I have no doubt that their wars will end as have ours.

Perhaps then, people of Floros, it will not be too late to migrate there.

CAPTAIN CETI.

The slim space ship gathered speed and left the planet that called itself Earth far behind.

WEST POINT

Trapped in the Underways as Martian revolt flames, Garr Devlin discovers the real meaning of West Point honor and of a thousand years of tradition

A horde of slobbering monsters charged out of the gloom

SYNOPSIS OF PART I

PART II of Manly Wade Wellman's "West Point, 3000 A. D" carries to its dramatic conclusion the story of Garr Devlin, underprivileged youth of the Underways, the underground slums of New York in the Year 3000.

In the first installment, Garr Devlin, strong of build, dark, purposeful, was kidnaped from the Underways by police of the Upper Town, after his father had been shot down for his "crimes."

The oppressed creatures of the Underways, never allowed to see the sun, tended Upper Town's great subterranean heat, light and water plants. But one among them, Garr Devlin's father, determined his son should grow up strong and healthy, had stolen precious vitamin rations and sun-ray lamps from the Upper Town.

His lot had been—death. Taken to the Upper Town, young Garr Devlin was impressed into service at Earth's military academy, West Point. At first bitterly rebellious, his defiance gradually weakened under the sympathetic interest of Nola Rakkam, daughter of West Point's superintendent, General Rakkam.

Suddenly a devilish plot on the part of a Martian military faction to seize control of Earth boiled over. The scheme was to employ Martian cadets at West Point as fifth columnists, arouse the Underways with promises of freedom and loot. Suddenly enmeshed in this treachery because he had been assigned by General Rakkam as an Intelligence student to share the same quarters with Bexlann, a Martian cadet, Garr Devlin is torn between his duty to the Point and his hatred of the Upper Town for its treatment of the Underways.

Just before he had discovered the plot, Garr Devlin had quarreled with Nola Rakkam. He had denounced her and all she stood for. But now he reconsidered. The Martians were foreign invaders; they must be crushed.

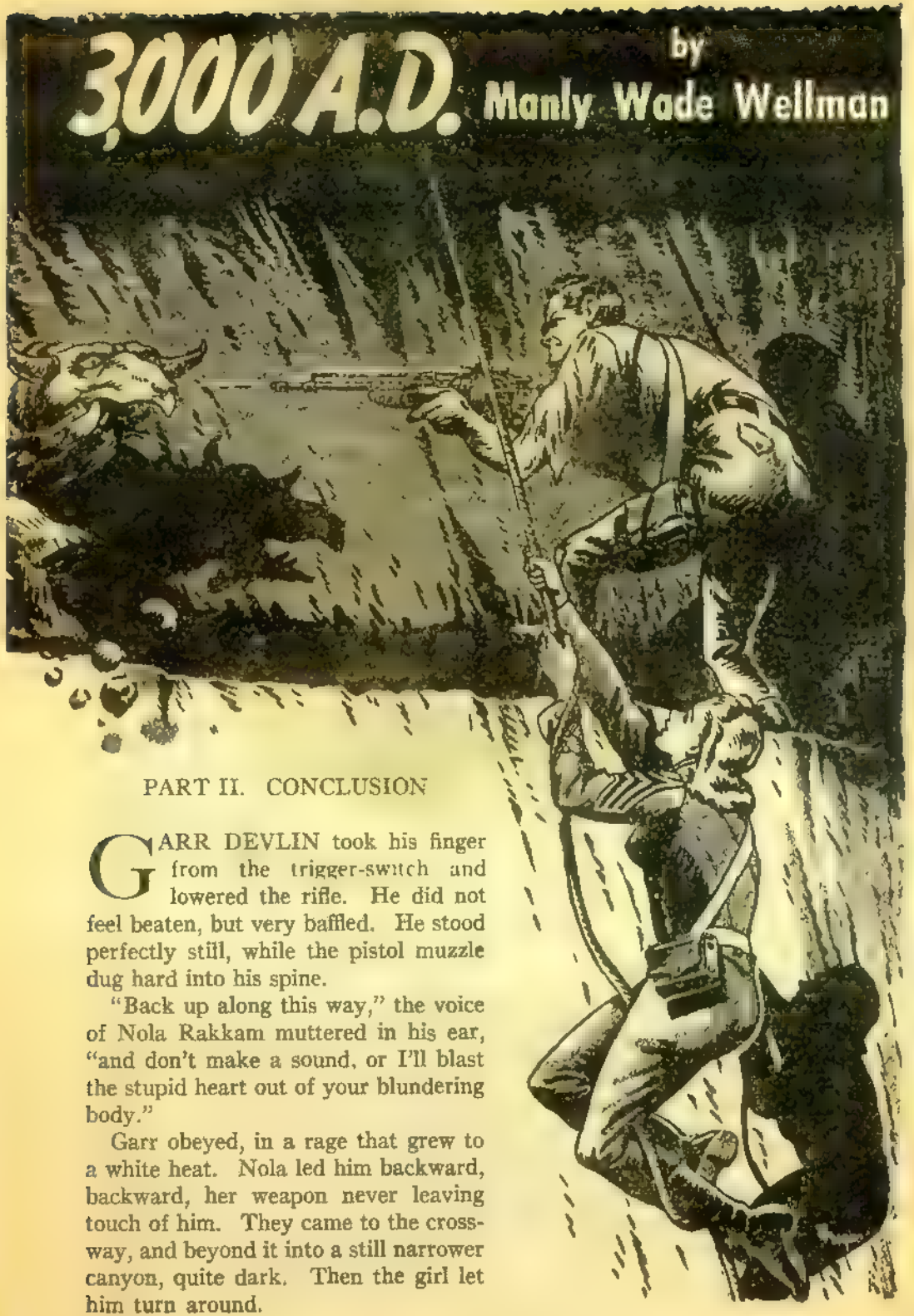
Stealthily Garr Devlin made his way below to a secret meeting place of the conspirators, was about to destroy Bexlann, now grown cruelly ambitious, when a pistol was suddenly prodded in his back.

"Put down that gun at once," commanded Nola Rakkam.

Now go on with the story:

3,000 A.D.

by Manly Wade Wellman



PART II. CONCLUSION

GARR DEVLIN took his finger from the trigger-switch and lowered the rifle. He did not feel beaten, but very baffled. He stood perfectly still, while the pistol muzzle dug hard into his spine.

"Back up along this way," the voice of Nola Rakkam muttered in his ear, "and don't make a sound, or I'll blast the stupid heart out of your blundering body."

Garr obeyed, in a rage that grew to a white heat. Nola led him backward, backward, her weapon never leaving touch of him. They came to the cross-way, and beyond it into a still narrower canyon, quite dark. Then the girl let him turn around.

"You fool," she snapped at him. "You utter clumsy fool!"

Garr made a clutch at the gun, but missed it in the darkness. Nola clubbed him on the temple with the stout barrel. His head rang with the blow, and he swayed back against the rough earthen wall.

"All right, go on and shoot," he bade her. "Something tells me that I was born to be shot. When I fight *against* West Point, all the trouble in the universe happens to me; when I fight *for* West Point, I run into you and your gun.

"I've thought hard of you, Nola Rakkam, but I never figured you for one of the sneaky Terrestrials who have joined the Martian outlaws for a chance to eat their own blood. Why don't you shoot me?"

"Because I may still get some thumbhanded help out of you, to knock down this uprising before if starts," she said shortly.

Garr almost yelped in disgust. "You mean, you want to fight against Bexlann and the conspiracy? But don't you know I had a bead on him just a moment ago? His life wasn't worth a whoop in a rocket blast. You stopped me. And now you expect me to believe—"

"Yes," Nola cut him off, with the cold disgust of a sergeant scolding a rookie. "You'd have killed him. Very dramatic. Next instant that mob would have torn open the grating and finished you—and I was right behind you, next in line.

"The uprising would have gone on as scheduled, without Bexlann to help or without any hindering from us. Whatever gave the government, or my father, or me, the silly idea that you were worth training and coaxing into service?" she demanded.

"At least I got here, almost to the heart of the thing," Garr returned with equal disdain. "I known that these Martian malcontents have an organized plan of overthrow, to go into action here and on Mars at dawn New York time."

Briefly he described how he had fought and trailed the conspirators, from the moment of leaving her after dinner until the present moment.

"That, I suppose, was the act of a blundering fool?" he finished.

"Up to a point, no. Thanks to the luck of the Rakkams, I kept you from turning it in to a blunder. But I've been just as active as you. You see, I told Dad—the General—what you had said about going over to the Martians. He was concerned, for he had suspicions that went beyond anything he'd told us.

"We started for your quarters, with an armed patrol, and came full into the dog-fight mess you'd started. We followed you right to the cubicle where the shot-tunnel is hidden."

"How did you know about that?" asked Garr.

"In the midst of the commotion, with Bexlann trying to throw off a search, I ducked into a locker. When the search turned elsewhere, I stayed behind. The Martians were too anxious about you to stop and tune in on the thought-waves of any possible lurker.

"So when they broke up, I saw Bexlann open the hidden panel. I waited for the coast to clear, followed him and found the tunnel. I sailed after him in one of their cars."

"It was you who killed the guards outside that office door!" Garr exclaimed.

"Right. And from one of them I got this thing."

NOLA held it up. It was the mind-reading headdress.

"I tried it on, and found out what it was for," she continued. "Since then

I've been skirmishing in the shadows. I potted several Martians in key positions—one of them almost over your shoulder—and I did something else, more important still."

She led Garr from the hiding, and into yet another corridor. Guardedly she whistled, and someone replied in the same note. They walked in that direction, and three men of the Underways — stooped, oldish fellows, but bright of eye and armed with pistols—came from a nook, saluting clumsily.

"What about it, Boss Lady?" one of them asked.

"These three men were walking along toward the meeting," Nola explained to Garr. "They were talking about it, and in their minds—I had on the thought-reader—was a sort of wavering wonder about the whole business. So I jumped out at them, and made a speech.

"A good one, too, for they came over to my side. We've followed you up, Garr, and now there are five of us to fight side by side."

"Right, Boss Lady," said the first speaker, and touched his grizzled forelock. "This young fella, he goin' help?"

Nola introduced Garr, and named the three new comrades. The one who had spoken first was called Murro, and was a gaunt gray man with humor-lines about his bearded mouth. The other two, both small but active, were called Greeley and Zatt. All were foremen of various machine shops, long working in the cause of the uprising, but of such skeptical mind that Nola's plea had won them away.

"Auxiliary Cadet Rakkam," said Garr weightily, "I'll do you the justice to say you've been busy and successful. Now, if we can get back to West Point and report—"

"No time for going back," Nola demurred. "We're here to battle this plot, smash it. Otherwise it'll get rolling here, and maybe it will never be stopped. But if we can clog it up, it will never be pulled off anywhere else."

Far away came the noise of many voices and feet.

"The meeting is breaking up," said Garr. "They're off to their posts, with instructions to close up the works at dawn and gather their adherents for an attack on the Upper Town."

"We don' like Uppa Town—" began Murro.

"That's right," Garr agreed, "but it's more than Upper Town, it's all Earth. Not the rich men, but all men. Well, Boss Lady," he took up the title Nola Rakkam had evidently earned, "you seem to be in charge and have ideas. Any orders?"

Nola was ready to take charge. The three foremen she instructed in their duties. They were to go to their jobs—one to the ventilator system, one to the public heating system, one to the water distributing works. Here they would quickly interview the best of the workers who were not included in the immediate plot.

These men, the foremen and their new recruits, would move just before the zero hour set by the Martian leaders, to overpower and bind the subordinate plotters, then barricade themselves and defend the works.

"I'll get more instructions and help to you as I can," Nola concluded. "Water, heat and air—these are things the town will need if it's to be defended."

The three saluted and left. Garr turned to Nola.

"Why did you let them go? That leaves only two of us—"

"Would five be any more apt to overthrow the overthrowers?" she said witheringly. "Pick up that rifle and follow me."

Garr did so, promptly but not cheer-

fully. Nola Rakkam was ordering him around more briskly than a whole staff of officers. But he had given her the right to do so, however glumly, and so far she had proved her mettle. Now she strode off purposefully.

"I think I know a way to sneak past that big meeting place and get closer to the middle of the Underways," Nola said.

"Yes? What way?"

"Here's where it begins." She paused at a widening of the corridor, just above a great rusty plate of metal. "It seems to go down into a sewer or something. Perhaps we—"

"Nola," broke in Garr earnestly, "come away from that place at once. You're in terrible danger." Catching her by the arm, he drew her back.

HER brown face turned up toward his with a narrow-eyed expression of query.

"What's the matter, Garr?"

"There are underways to the Underways," he explained. "Deep, dark holes we know nothing about—haven't dared venture into. And they're inhabited by strange things, awful things."

"Yes? I thought you said you knew nothing about them," Nola prodded him.

"Stories are told," Garr insisted "Sometimes things are dropped down, and we hear strange cries drift up. But nobody dares venture down."

"I dare," said Nola stoutly, and heaved the big sheet of metal up with a sudden effort. It remained tilted, and a gust of chill drifted up from the exposed opening.

"If slum superstitions have kept people out of these lower depths, we won't be bothered in there," Nola reasoned. "We can find our way beyond, I say, and get help. And we'd better start now, there's no time to waste."

She stooped. "Look, there's some kind of a ladder going down. And the shaft slopes."

Garr made a clutch, and pinned her by the shoulder.

"Nola," he said, "this is where I take over. We don't go down. I'll face Martians, but not whatever's down there."

"You're a coward," she sniffed.

"That's as may be. Come away—"

"Now!" shrilled a voice of metal, and from a side-corridor stepped half a dozen figures with weapons. Martians!

"Ssurrenderr, you sspiess!" the leader of them commanded fiercely. "We caught the thought-waves of the woman—if you do not give up immediately—"

Garr let go of Nola and opened fire with his rifle.

He knocked over one of the foremost Martians, and then stooped low, dragging Nola with him. An answering volley of pellets sang through the air on the level where his head had been. Another moment, and he had drawn the girl to shelter behind the uptilted cover of the shaft. More pellets struck the metal, without effect; their thermic charge was effective only against flesh.

"Come out of therre!" shouted the Martians again.

"Come in and get us," taunted Nola, and leaned close to the tilted defense, trying a snap shot with her pistol. A moment later she drew back.

"That metal's hot," she whispered. "They're turning an MS-ray* on it."

"The better for us — we'll have a loophole to shoot through."

Garr fired around the other side of their shield, and made an enemy duck. The Martians scattered to shelter.

"Good, Nola!" he said under his

*The metal-solvent ray of the thirtieth century disrupted and oxidized metallic compounds, while it completely disintegrated less sturdy substances. It was of great value from the time it was invented, both as a weapon and a tool.—Ed.

breath. "We've got their heads down. Let's withdraw to the rear and see if we can get away."

At that moment, a scurry sounded behind them. More enemies were charging from the opposite direction.

"We're trapped!" cried Nola, bringing her pistol into play.

"Back to back," crisped Garr, now taking command. They both sprang erect, firing at all moving things at either end of the tunnel.

But then Nola, shifting her stance, trod upon emptiness. She gave a wild scream, and pitched into the exposed shaft to the unknown darkness beneath them. Garr tried to seize her and pull her back, lost his balance in turn and fell through.

He struck the steepest of slopes, rolled over and over at headlong speed. His head struck against something hard, and he plunged on down the incline half-stunned, fetching up at last amid dirt and rubble, in darkness thick enough to drown him.

CHAPTER XI

Under the Underways

"GARR!" Nola was calling from somewhere. "Garr Devlin! Where are you?"

"Right here, within reach," he replied, sitting up and putting out his hand. He touched her face, and it jerked nervously away.

"Don't be frightened, Nola. We'll get out of this some way."

"I'm not frightened at all, thanks," she lied in some heat, but came close and caught him by the sleeve, as though to draw reassurance from contact. "Only—it was quite a descent, wasn't it?"

Far above them showed a dim green disk of light, the head of the shaft down which they had rolled. A Martian was calling down to them.

"You have brrought fate upon yourrselvess. Sstay down therre and meet the death that hidess besside you—if you come up, we will kill you in a way even worrsse."

And the lid dropped with a muffled clang. The darkness, if anything, was more absolute.

"Nice people, our Martian brothers," commented Garr.

"We're where I wanted us to go in the first place," rejoined Nola smugly. "Now I'll have a chance to uncover those Underways superstitions—"

"If you'll take a good look," interrupted Garr, in a voice that had more harsh triumph than anything else, "you'll find one of those Underways superstitions trying to crawl into your lap."

As he spoke, she saw what he saw—two dull orange lights, that must be eyes, set wide apart and well up above the floor of the tunnel. The lights were moving slowly toward them.

Nola gasped, only once.

"Garr," she said quickly and quietly, "I've dropped my pistol. Do you still have that rifle?"

"I do," he said. The weapon had not left his grip in all that headlong tumble downward. He lifted it to his shoulder, leveling it by guess in the direction of the approaching orange eyes, and touched the trigger-switch.

Nothing happened, except that the orange eyes drew closer. There was a rhythmic panting to be heard, and a heavy *shuff-shuff* of dragging weight.

"Why don't you shoot, then?" Nola was demanding, with her usual insistent sharpness. Not even unknown horrors could seem to soften her impatience with Garr Devlin.

"Rifle's jammed," said Garr quickly. "Try to find the way up the shaft, Nola.

Get clear away if you can. I'm going to get to grips with this fellow."

He moved to meet the advancing twin gleam. It was well within a man's length of him now. A sharp odor smote his nostrils, and something like a living, moving wire swayed against his body in the dark. Before he could step away, it circled and tightened upon him. Another, another—a whole sheaf of slender, strong filaments took hold of him. He was dragged powerfully forward.

"No, you don't!" Garr roared and, spinning the rifle so that the butt was foremost, drove it at the eyes.

He hit something squashly, and there was a grunting *whoom*, like a puff of wind from a bellows. Again he struck, and this time he heard teeth, or what he took for teeth, grating on the metal of the rifle-stock. He could not jerk it away. Still holding him in its manifold tendrils, the creature was trying to wrest the rifle from him in its mouth.

Grimly Garr shoved hard. The butt slid through the gripping jaws. It hit something yielding, and the creature emitted a cough.

"Garr," said Nola, close behind him, "get down as low as you can. I've found my pistol—I'm going to shoot."

HE threw himself flat as possible, the tendrils swarming all over him. A moment later, Nola's gun pinged. The pellet slapped home and glowed up, red and hot. For a moment Garr saw, by its greatening light, the thing he had faced—a bull-sized hulk, with a great round gourd of a head from which sprouted, like whiskers, the lines that had seized him.

Then the pellet's fire died, and with it the monster. Garr kicked loose from the limp confines, and a moment later felt Nola's shoulder against his.

"What in heaven's name was that?" he asked, trying not to sound shaky.

"I think I know," replied Nola in a voice equally hard to control. "Have you a light?"

"No. The Martians took everything I had when they captured me."

"I have a radium flare of sorts, I think."

Garr heard her fumbling in her pockets. Then a spear head of white flame shone above her fist. They both studied the limp bulk of their late assailant. It was legless, but the lower part of its soft, sluglike body was set with huge rubbery surfaces on which it could hump along like a gastropod. In the midst of its beard opened the mouth, still gripping Garr's rifle-stock.

"A Martian beast," said Nola. "I've seen pictures."

"I'd agree with you, if I didn't know that all Martian animals except the one ruling race were long extinct." *

"There must have been a few specimens, kept for scientific or show purposes. And do you know what this proves?"

Nola pointed to the carcass. "Quite the contrary. The Martians, working in the Underways, took advantage of the beliefs to populate these lower caverns with their monsters. Probably they wanted to employ the fear of such things to help gain power over the workers.

"To judge from what they shouted down at us," and her manner grew grave again, "we're in pretty deadly danger from them. There must be more than this one."

"There are," and Garr pointed ahead of them. Another hulk, similar to the thing Nola had shot, was moving away.

*In the earlier, richer days of Mars' prehistory, many animals inhabited the planet. With the coming of deserts and other conditions inimical to disorganized existence, many of the creatures died, and the rise of the Canal civilization with its highly mechanized culture brought about the extinction of other species as useless.—Ed.

"Your light's evidently a better weapon than the gun. These things are darkness bred and can't stand any strong radiance."

Nola held her flare on high, keeping her pistol ready in the other hand. For want of a better weapon, Garr recovered his jammed rifle and carried it clubwise. Side by side, they moved along the passage.

It was about forty feet across, that tunnel, floored with crumbling concrete and lined on either side with ancient cracked tiling. There were signs of metal rails underfoot, almost completely rusted away.

"One of the subways of the ancients,"* suggested Nola. "That means it runs north and south—we're going south now. We'll get under that assembly cavern, as I said."

"And how will we get up again?" asked Garr.

"Don't worry about the future—the present has worries enough. Let's step out, and keep an eye skinned for any more Martian zoological wonders."

GARR was certain that loathsome creatures followed them just outside the range of their little radium light, but he did not say so to Nola. Instead, he pointed to some bones, half fallen to powder, beside their way.

"Human," he announced. "People have been down here—climbed down, or thrown down, or dropped down like us. And those big blood-drinkers finished them."

"Probably people have been put in here to be punished, or simply to be hushed up," elaborated Nola. "Yet there must be some better reason than that for all this elaborate maintenance of a zoo below floors. I add two and two, and hope to find something else."

"Such as what?" Garr asked.

"I wish I knew."

They rounded a curve, and came to a steel grating that completely blocked their way. Two or three amorphous shapes dragged themselves to right and left, and retreated along the tunnel from the light beams. Nola came close to the close-set bars and lifted her flare higher.

"I was right," Nola said.

"Eh?"

"Here's a place fenced off. Probably the secret's pretty jealously guarded, with the menagerie maintained to defend it from any prying people like us. Of course, they didn't count on pocket lamps and electro-automatics." She peered. "I see things stacked inside—arms, I think."

Garr also looked through the grating, and saw that what she said was true. The place was an arsenal. Against the decrepit tiles of one wall leaned a row of rifles. At another point, closer to him, was a round rack of MS-ray throwers, each fitted with a gunstock, a trigger-switch, and a heavy magazine-like generator next to the cylindrical nozzle.

There were stacks of chest and cases, probably filled with smaller arms and amunition.

But then a heavy multiple shuffling resounded on their back trail. Both turned to see.

A whole horde of the creeping whiskered creatures had followed them, and now advanced upon them, braving the light and the weapons at last.

"Shoot, Nola!" cried Garr at once, and she did so.

Her first pellet landed squarely between two orange-glowing eyes, stopping one of the foremost attackers. At once the stricken one's nearest neigh-

*When more advanced methods of transportation came into use at New York in the twentieth century, the old tubes were kept open as air-raid shelters. Subsequent bombings and wreckings covered them very deeply, and they were all but forgotten by the thirtieth century.—Ed.

bors turned upon it, clutching and gnawing ravenously. But the others bore down inexorably, though deliberately, upon the two cornered humans.

"Isn't there some way to get through this grating?" Nola asked.

"No. There's a door, but it's locked," replied Garr, stealing a quick glance to make sure.

He set his back to the bars and lifted his clubbed rifle in both hands.

"This looks like the end of two stray cadets," said Garr Devlin.

"We'll make it a good one, then," rejoined the girl stoutly, and fired again, at the nearest and biggest of the creatures.

It collapsed, was swarmed over by cannibalistic mates, and for a moment the whole advance hesitated, then flowed on. Nola aimed yet again, but her pistol refused to fire.

"It's empty!" she groaned.

Garr fairly ripped open the pellet-container of his useless rifle.

"Here," and he gouged out the cylinder of ammunition and thrust it into her hand. "Will that work? No?"

"It's too big to fit," said Nola desperately, trying vainly to work it into the magazine chamber of her smaller weapon.

"Give it back, then." Garr snatched it from her, and with a twist and a jerk uncapped the cylinder. "If I can get some of these in contact with our handsome friends yonder—"

HE swung the open cylinder and threw it. The pellets, flying out of the spinning container, scattered over the foremost beasts like a flung handful of pebbles. Immediately they glowed into killing fire, though the force of Garr's throw was not enough to drive them deeply in.

There was a sudden chorus of coughing howls, and the stricken ones began to roll and flounder in pain. Others leaped upon them, and momentarily Garr and Nola found themselves forgotten.

Garr turned quickly back to the bars.

"Hold up that flare again, Nola. I want to see."

By the light of the little torch he put his rifle through the bars, holding it by the muzzle at arm's length. The toe of the stock just touched the top of the circular rack of ray throwers.

Holding his breath prayerfully, Garr experted all possible pressure. The rack tipped, went off balance. It fell, and its freight of weapons flew in all directions. One rolled almost to the grating. Down stooped Garr, caught it and dragged it through to him.

"Can you use that thing?" stammered Nola hopefully.

"Watch me," he bade her grimly. Even as the grotesque things resumed their menacing advance, he turned the ray full into the thick of them.

The corridor sprang into full glare of white light. Before the outpouring of the ray power, great coarse bodies fluffed away into atoms, like moths in a lantern. Garr yelled in exultation as the survivors behind gave back and sought shelter in the darkness.

"They're intelligent enough to know that they're licked!" cried Nola.

"Yes, and we're getting out of here," rejoined Garr.

Shifting his ray to the iron bars that fenced them off from the arsenal, Garr quickly oxidized a passage for him and Nola to slide through.

CHAPTER XII

Counter-Attack

WITHIN less than a minute, a section of one bar had been cut away. Nola squeezed through, then Garr. The

opening was a tight fit for them, and none of their brute enemies could follow through it.

Nola's first move was to a great upright case of sheet-iron, which was filled with loaded cylinders of pistol pellets. With a grim nod of satisfaction, she reloaded her empty gun and put extra cylinders into the pockets of her tunic.

"I won't be caught short of ammunition again," she vowed.

Garr, for his part, checked the various items in the arsenal. They were all small arms—rays, rifles, pistols, hand bombs with portable radio equipment to guide them to their targets.

"No infantry could ask for better street-fighting equipment than this," he commented. "What's it for?"

"For your fellow Underwayers," replied Nola. "I doubt if any of them are armed now, except the key men of the plot—a big showing of weapons in the workshops would bring out the police. After the general stoppage at dawn, they'll probably report here to be armed. There seems to be enough equipment in this place for two or three thousand."

"Would that be enough to take New York?" Garr asked her.

"Enough to surprise and seize the armories, communications and government. Probably other groups will be ready to join then, don't you suppose?"

Nola strolled around the confines of the arsenal.

"See, there's a barred obstruction on the far side, too. That means more dangerous things to be guarded against."

Garr gazed up. A perpendicular shaft, with grab-iron rungs to make a ladder, rose up through the stout concrete ceiling.

"From what I judge, we've come to a point beneath, or nearly beneath, that big cavity where the meeting was held," he told Nola. "It's apparently an important post of the conspirators—remote from the rest of the Underways, easily guarded and defended, big enough to accommodate a sizable force— Hark!" Garr turned toward the tunnel from which they had come.

"I heard something," he said.

"Me, too," rejoined Nola, and switched off her light. "Look, I can see a torch of some kind—and there must be several of them, I hear their footsteps."

"We're getting out of here," said Garr. "Start up the shaft."

Nola thrust her reloaded pistol into her belt.

"What if it's guarded above?" she asked.

"We'll have to take our chance, but I think the meeting's dispersed. Anyway, we can't wait for this other party to catch up with us. Get going."

"No, I'm in charge of the party. I have the rear guard post in any retreat," she insisted.

"Damn your stubborn soul!" Garr exclaimed hotly.

Clutching at Nola in the dark, he seized her by the shoulders and fairly hoisted her into the shaft.

"Climb, I say," he bullied her, and both of them began to scramble, for the lights in the tunnel grew brighter. Nola, ahead, reached the top of the shaft in a quick effort and began to push at the metal cover.

But hardly had her hand touched it when something above heaved it back.

"Earrth girrl," rasped a voice in the cavern, "come out, orr we kill you."

Nola's teeth came together hard.

"You knew I was down here?" she asked the Martians who stood at the brink of the shaft, covering her with their weapons.

"Of courrse. One of the guarrds caught yourr mental wavelength. We

thought forr a time that you had a comrade, but we got no rressponsse frrom ssuch a one. Come out, we tell you."

NOLA obeyed dolefully, and her captor closed the metal lid after her. She was quickly disarmed, and the group in the upper tunnel, both Martians and Terrestrials, gathered around to study her.

"I know thiss girrl," volunteered one Martian, the cadet Bexlann, as he joined the group. "She iss the child of Generral Rrakkam at West Point, and musst have followed me here."

"General's kid, hmm?" grunted a broad-faced Underways lout. "Lemme hit her."

"Hold on," interposed Bexlann. "Sshe iss too valuable to hurrt. I wissh to learrn ssomething frrom herr. How, Misss Rrakkam, did you manage to get into that arrmss depot?"

Silence, Nola realized, would not be enough. She must control her thoughts, lest these enemies read them.

"I must hide what I think," she said to herself. "Hide what I think—hide what I think—"

"It iss of no usse to fight againsst mind-rreading," warned Bexlann. "Why do you perrssisst in hiding ssecrretss frrom uss?"

Multiplication table — that was it. That would stall them off.

"Two times two are four," she said in her mind. "Two times three are six. Two times four are eight—"

"Talk, orr you will be sorrry!"

Nola lifted her chin in disdain of Bexlann's threats.

"Two times six are twelve, two times seven are fourteen."

"Put herr in a ssafe prrison," directed Bexlann. "Give herr time to rrealize herr grrave dangerr. If sshe rremainss sstubborrn—perrhapss we will turrn herr overr to thiss eagerr ally of ourrs."

"Do that," begged the broad-faced one, knotting his big fists. "I like!"

The two guards marched Nola away between them.

THE LID FELL upon Garr Devlin, who scrambled quickly down again. The Martians, failing to tune in on his mind, had no inkling of his presence, but he could hardly hope to escape what now approached him. Gaining the floor of the arsenal, he groped for a rifle in the rack nearby. A quick exploration with his fingers showed him that it was loaded and ready to shoot.

The lights had come to the bars through which he and Nola had passed a minute or so ago. Somebody—a stealthy silhouette in the glare, hard to recognize as Martian or Terrestrial—was investigating the cut bar. Whispering; then the light went out.

Garr slid along to a more sheltered place between cases of bombs. But his rifle dragged metallically on the cement floor. At once a voice spoke:

"Who's there?"

It was neither Martian nor Underway accent. Garr kept still.

"We heard you," said the voice again, and somehow Garr felt he had heard it before. "Come out here, or we'll start shooting."

Garr pushed the muzzle of his rifle against a bomb case.

"I'm not going to be taken," he answered grimly. "If you rush me, I'll set off these bombs. There'll be an explosion that will tear open all this part of the Underways, and bring a quick rush of police from up above. Then where'll your uprising be? Don't think I'm bluffing, because I'm tired of this whole business!"

There were several cries of wonder. And then a voice, a young man's voice and instantly recognizable:

"General, I know who that is. It's

Cadet Devlin!"

"Diasu!" cried Garr at once, and stood up. "What are you doing down here?"

The light went on again. Then the first speaker addressed him.

"This is General Rakkam, Cadet Devlin. I'll ask you the same question —what are you doing here, and where's my daughter?"

GARR rose and approached. "It's warfare, sir, and rebellion. Come in here—there are strange animals in that tunnel. And I'll tell you as quickly as I can."

The general entered, and Garr described his adventures and Nola's, as briefly as possible. General Rakkam interrupted with questions, and at the end nodded purposefully.

"We missed my daughter when she went into that end cubicle with me," Rakkam said. "I came back, and questioned the Martian who lodged there. He baffled me for a while, but I knew something was up, and persisted until he told me part of the truth. I called two cadets I trusted, and with a ray we cut our way into the head of the shot-tunnel."

Garr took time to look at Rakkam's companions. They were De Vigny and Diasu.

"Yes, your former roommates," Rakkam nodded. "Some days ago, Devlin, I took them partially into my confidence, hoping they would help induce you to accept discipline. They have a certain prejudice in your favor—chiefly because you seem dramatically independent. And so I thought they would serve well tonight, if they knew that there was a chance of helping you."

"Thank you all," said Garr.

He found these things hard to understand—that young men he had snubbed and even fought with should be so eager to bring him to safety.

All he could say was: "How did you know I was here?"

"We didn't," volunteered Diasu, "but we did know the arsenal was. A magnetic finder showed us the way, and we dropped down a trapdoor to see why and how arms were hidden. Those animals you mentioned must have been demoralized by your own resistance—they only made shadows around our lights, never attacked once."

Garr only half heard this. He was thinking of Nola Rakkam.

She had meant to show courage. She had fallen into the hands of the Martians, but had adroitly kept him from being caught as well. He had a vision of her sunbronzed face and gray eyes. How pretty she was, how brave and how forthright . . . What would be happening to her now? Garr scowled to himself.

"Sir," he addressed General Rakkam, "how can we get up there and help your daughter?"

For answer, the officer pointed to the overturned rack of ray throwers.

"Get those," he ordered. "Since the enemy is probably guarding the shaftway she came up, we'll cut ourselves a new one."

CHAPTER XIII

Daughter of a Soldier

NOLA RAKKAM had progressed far in the multiplication table. *Eight times six are forty-eight*, she told herself. Bexlann made a writhing gesture of disgust.

"Forr the lasst time," he raged at her, "will you tell me what disspositionss yourr parrty hass made againsst uss?"

"Eight times seven are fifty-six," Nola taunted him aloud, "and don't you wish you knew? I'll promise you this

much, that we're not only up with you —we're far ahead of you.

"We can move, think and fight better than you. That stupid plot of yours is as good as cracked open, and you're as good as executed for a traitor and murderer."

Bexlann seemed to quiver briefly and intensely, like a plucked fiddle-string. He turned toward the door of the little earth-walled cell where he had imprisoned the girl.

"I have tried to be rreassonable, but therre iss no time left forr morre of thiss usselesss jabberr." Bexlann leaned out the door. "Wherre iss that man Grrissnold? The one who offered to sstrrike thiss sstuborrn female?"

"Right here, sir," spoke up an eager voice near at hand. "What you want?"

"I give you perrmisssion to do what you assked," replied Bexlann bleakly.

He drew back into the cell, and a figure followed him—the broad-faced man of the Underways who had threatened Nola in the cavern outside.

"Grrissnold," said Bexlann, "I sshall rretirre. You may have plenty of rroom to pound ssenssibility into thiss foolissh girrl. I wissh you joy of the tassk."

Nola looked disdainfully from the Martian to the Terrestrial. The latter grinned broadly. His teeth were big and blocky, framed in a bristly red beard that glittered in the light of the radium lamp overhead. He turned up a frayed sleeve, exposing a big, corded forearm.

"I like," he snickered. "Have good time."

Bexlann went out, closing the door behind him. The man he had called Grisnold took a step close to Nola. His grin seemed to crawl more widely across his great hairy slab of a face."

"Go on and hit me," challenged Nola. "It takes a big, brave man to hit a woman, doesn't it? Would it help any if I spat in your face?"

But he lifted a big spadelike palm, as if to enjoin silence.

"No talk," he whispered. "No talk." He turned, as if cocking an ear toward the door. "That Martian, him gone, I guess. Now, Boss Lady, how you goin' get outa here?"

Nola's disdainful glare became a blank gaze of surprise.

"Who—who are you?" she stammered.

"My name Grisnold. Murro, he send me—you know Murro, him foreman at water works. Murro say, see things go okay. Me like him."

He wagged his head over Nola, in amiable relish.

"First thing, I tell Murro him fool, he take orders from girl. But Murro, he had right word. You plenty spunky, plenty brave, you bet!"

The jerky jargon of the Underways was hard to understand, but Nola gathered that Grisnold thoroughly approved of her.

"I hope no Martian is hearing this," she said. "Even at a distance they can tune in on our brains."

"Not my brain," announced Grisnold proudly. "Now and then, some special Undaway man born—Martians can't read his mind. I'm such. Ever since I little boy, Martians int'res'ed in me 'cause of that. They got me in their scheme, and now—how we get out, I say?"

Nola was pondering quickly. This sturdy, grinning fellow seemed honest, and she would like to trust him; but if he were a spy, she must not betray secrets.

"I don't quite know," she said vaguely. "I'm all alone in this just now, against so many—"

"How 'bout boy named Devlin with you?" Grisnold asked her. "Murro tell me him good man."

THAT decided Nola. A moment ago, the Martians had plainly proved that they knew nothing of Garr. Otherwise they would have seized him, too, in the shaft. Therefore Grisnold must actually be a friend of Murro and herself.

"I don't know about Devlin just now," Nola said quite truthfully, "but I hope he's all right. What I do know is that there's a great amount of arms—enough for a regiment or so. Could we raise a force?"

Grisnold shook his head dubiously.

"Not more than fifty-sixty. That include all boys in shops near Murro, that got guts to fight."

"Fifty or sixty, with guts, would be something," Nola replied stoutly. "Especially if we surprise these Martians."

Grisnold thought it could be done, especially if the loyal party were gathered in the cavity just outside. The Martian headquarters were in several blind tunnels, old and forgotten, leading into the cavity.

Nola looked at her wrist-watch. It was a full hour until dawn.

"Hurry," she bade her new friend. "Get to Murro, tell him to hustle together all the men he can spare from the works and send them to me. He and those other foremen must stay at their shops to keep them from being shut down—that's most important—and someone must hunt up a policeman."

"Policeman?" echoed Grisnold, who liked the word no better than most Underways folk. "Any policeman tell us this yarn big lie."

"I recognize that," Nola said patiently, " but don't tell him the truth. Tell him that a mob of trouble-makers intends to wreck the shops. That's true as far as it goes, and it ought to bring out a guard patrol, at least. What's more—"

The door flew open.

"All verry rremarrkable and interressting," commented the dry voice of Bexlann. "Grrissnold, you have long known the penalty forr trreasson to ourr purrpossess. I will have you drropped down into the lowerr depthss, among the dwellerrss therre."

Grisnold gazed at him dumbly. "How —how—"

"How did I ssee thrrough yourr perrfidy? Not by rreading that unrreadable mind of yourrss—by rreading thiss lady'ss. Sshe kept a mental barrrierr beforre me at firrsst—but when I wass gone, she rrelaxed. I rreturrned to invesstigate."

Grisnold was fumbling inside his shirt, but Bexlann made a quick motion with a tentacle. From under his own tunic he whipped a small, bright ray thrower.

"Sstand sstill," he warned, "orr I will sscorrch you to an assh."

Nola, her heart pounding, turned toward Bexlann in brave defiance.

"Perhaps you see now how hopeless this plot is," she said pointedly. "You felt that this man was your certain dupe and tool, but he has turned against you of his own will. Many others can do the same—may be doing it now. You cannot seriously expect to win."

"We do not carre wherre theirr ssympathiess arre, afterr the uprrissing beginss," Bexlann returned harshly. "By that time, they cannot choosse but to obey uss. They will have bloodied theirr handss, and will not darre falterr afterr that."

The ray thrower in his tentacle trained itself upon the two.

"Come out of herre," ordered Bexlann. "I must ssummon morre guarrdss, and desstrroy you both immediately."

Grisnold had stood silent, one hand inside his shirt, ever since Bexlann had beaten him to the draw.

"Pretty sure, huh, Martian?" he snarled. "Happen you turn 'round, look behind—"

"An ancient trrick," sneered Bexlann. "I will not rrelax my watch overr you."

"This time I tell truth. Somebody sneak up to conk you on head."

BEXLANN did not stir. "You make yourrsself ssound earrnesst. Ssuch lying might trrap a Terresstrrial. But if one werre trruly behind me, I would rread hiss mind. And sso I trreat yourr sshabby lie with contempt—"

Something shiny flashed up behind him, and down upon his shaggy cranium.

Bexlann touched the switch of his ray thrower, but already he had begun to crumple, and the ray ploughed briefly into the dirt floor between Nola's planted feet. He himself collapsed, dead before he struck the clods. Revealed behind him stood—Garr Devlin!

"All right, Nola," Garr said, without lowering the clubbed rifle in his hands. "Who's this with you?"

"He's on our side," replied Nola.

"Come out, then, both of you. We may win this scrap yet!"

UNDER GENERAL RAKKAM'S direction, the cadets had plowed a slanting tunnel upward from the arsenal. It had come to a point level with the floor of the assembly cavern, but within the earth that walled it on the outward side.

Then, after careful computation, Rakkam planned an entry into the tunnel rather than into the cavern itself. Garr, emerging first, had spied Bexlann returning to Nola's cell, had followed him and struck him down.

He led the girl and Grisnold to the dark tunnel-mouth where General Rakkam waited with De Vigny and Diasu. The general's eyes glowed for a brief second at sight of his daughter safe again; but then he began to issue crisp orders.

"There are thousands against us, but mostly deluded Underways folk, neither too well informed nor too carefully organized. They're supposed to stop their machines and wait in the shops until their Martian leaders mobilize them at dawn.

"I understand that we've put spokes in their wheels already, so to speak, at three different shops. Any elevators running from those shops to the Upper Town?"

"Yes," replied Grisnold. "From all."

"That means the Martians would send up attacks. Instead of which, we'll bring down defenses." Rakkam turned to the cadets he had brought with him. "De Vigny, Diasu—in your hands will be that job."

From inside his tunic he whipped a message book, quickly dashing off a note.

"Take this to the Corps Area Headquarters in the Upper Town. They'll mobilize a force, quickly and quietly. Come along, and I'll put you on an elevator." To Grisnold he said: "Lead the way to your friend Murro."

"And we?" prompted Nola.

Her father pointed to where, against the wall of the tunnel, were stacked weapons brought from the arsenal—three ray throwers, rifles, pistols and some boxes of pellets for the firearms.

"There's armament. You and Devlin will stay here and keep the Martians from moving out of their tunnels yonder. Understand, both of you? They must not be allowed to get past this cavity."

"We'll die fighting them, sir," promised Devlin, but the general shook his head.

"I don't want you to die. Stay alive, and stay in action. I myself will bring help as soon as possible."

There was an exchange of salutes, and Rakkam's party followed Grisnold away down the tunnel at a quick walk.

Garr took one of the ray throwers, turning its power about a quarter of the way on. Directing it against the floor at the mouth of the tunnel, he ploughed up earth and gravel to make a little hummock for protection purposes. Into the hollow he made, the little party drooped. Their bodies were well concealed behind the impromptu parapet.

GARR said: "Your friend Grisnold figured fifty men to help us? There must be at least a hundred Martians yonder, waiting to jump into key positions."

"We're here to slow them up," said Nola, as stoutly as her father the general would have said it. "And we'd better start. Here they come."

At the mouth of the largest tunnel, just opposite, appeared Martians. One or two wore the embroidered robes of high officials. All were armed.

"Moving before dawn, to be in plenty of time," she elaborated.

"If only forty good fighting men were here—" Garr began.

"There aren't, but we are," Nola cut in. "Commence firing."

She blazed away with a pistol, her favorite weapon. The foremost Martian ducked and crouched. Garr fired with a rifle, a Martian twittered in pain. The others drew back, but they had located the point from whence the shots had come.

At once a rain of electro-automatic pellets splattered around Garr and Nola. They lay flat in their hollow, reserving their own fire. The Martians, evidently thinking them hit or driven back, ventured into the open.

They paid for their temerity with the loss of two of their number, shot down by Garr and Nola. The others again withdrew to the shadows, firing as they went.

Garr flattened himself in his shelter. A pellet, aimed at him, came so close to penetrating the protecting mound of gravel that he felt its flare-off of heat. More fire was opened from an adjacent tunnel. More of the enemy were arriving.

"They'll try to rush us," muttered Nola.

"Don't let them. You take the left tunnel, I'll take the right. Fill every corner with shots. Even if we hit nothing, they'll have to wait."

Rising to one knee, Garr suited action to word. His gush of fire had its effect, for from the tunnel he covered came no answering pellets. When he had exhausted his magazine, he dropped the rifle and reached for another.

A metallic yelp resounded across the cavern. The foe, pinned to the tunnel floor by Garr's momentary rain of fire, had waited for this lull. A dozen Martians, gleaming in their body-harness, dashed out and charged. They carried ray throwers, roving bombs and guns.

"We can't hold them," said Nola. "Shall we fall back?"

"We daren't," gritted Garr, firing and missing in his agitation.

But at that moment came a cry from behind:

"Boss lady! Devlin. We coming!"

Grisnold rushed forward, catching up one of the rifles and firing into the thick of the oncoming Martians. General Rakkam appeared beside him, thundering orders to shabby figures in gray Underways clothing.

Within seconds, every weapon that had been brought up from the arsenal was in operation. Half the Martians fell, almost at the mouth of the de-

fended tunnel. The others scurried back.

"We've got about thirty-five men," clipped out Rakkam. "Some of them can shoot, and none will run away. If we make a stand of it, Earth may be saved."

CHAPTER XIV

The Battle of the Caverns

PERHAPS, by scale of military operations, it was not much of a conflict. The ground of contention was a scooped-out chamber in the insulated depths of Earth, with an uneven, musty floor a few thousand square yards in extent.

On one side were arranged less than one hundred Martian adventurers and tricksters, deadly enough in spirit, but more inclined to let others do the fighting and dying while they directed and profited.

On Earth's side were about one-third that number of Terrestrials—folk born in darkness and reared in toil, bewildered and limited and only sketchily organized; but assured of the danger to Earth that involved themselves also, and able to wield with courage if not with skill the weapons placed in their hands by leaders they had never seen before.

All told, a vest-pocket battle. Yet it took place at a spot where four tunnels branched away into dead ends. One of these contained the head of the shot-tunnel that led northward to West Point. The others were unused pockets, admirable for hatching places of plots, but apt to become traps when cut off.

The only way to the main labyrinth of the Underways, where revolt was set like a great powder keg for the torch, was across the cavern and up the three tunnels now held by the counter-revolutionaries.

If the Martians could be kept where they were and destroyed, the uprising against Earth's government would fail for want of their leadership.

In the central tunnel of the defense position, Garr Devlin used an MS-ray at quarter strength to throw up more earth for the barricade.

"Hold your rifle down low," he cautioned the man nearest him. "You don't know how to shoot, but at this range you can hardly miss if you remember to use your sights." He turned to a cross-passage. "How's it with you, Nola?"

"All's well, not even much shooting," she called from the left-hand corridor. "I've sent a detail down by that digging of yours to bring up more arms and munitions. The big attack's developing to the right, where Dad is."

That was true. Garr slid across to see. General Rakkam stood upright, disregarding the pellets that rent the air around him. He spoke to the prone riflemen at his feet as calmly as though they were on a practice range, his gloved fingers indicating the targets opposite.

"Try to make your shots count," he kept saying. "Even if you hit nothing, you'll make them keep their heads down. Yes, Devlin, what is it?"

"I think they're planning a surprise, sir," replied Garr. "I don't know what, but it seems that if they hadn't some sort of strategy on the make, there'd be a desperate effort to drive us out. Am I right?"

"Quite right," nodded the general coolly. "They must be up on all our attitudes and attempts—probably have several mental observers standing easy to catch whatever thoughts are in our minds."

"Might they be trying to tunnel around us with rays?" suggested Garr.

"Hardly. They seem to have only a few pistol-type ray throwers—not

powerful enough for the job. I thought there might be an attempt to slip down below and rush the arsenal, and I put that man Grisnold down there with ten men. Of course, they'd be aware of Terrestrial brains in that quarter, and are holding off."

"Will you let me take charge down there, sir?" asked Garr suddenly.

"Why, yes. But what do you plan to do?"

"I'd rather not explain, sir. The Martians can't read my mind, as they can yours. Will you let me go ahead on my own?"

"Very good, Devlin. We can hold here without you. Carry on," ordered the general.

GARR ran back to his central tunnel, called Nola over to take charge, and placed a trustworthy-seeming fellow in command at the quieter left position she quitted. Then he scrambled quickly down the slanting way to the arsenal.

It was lighted, and Grisnold's party was on the alert. One turned suspiciously upon him, rifle poised.

"Who?" he challenged. "Oh, Devlin. What you want?"

"All of you, go up above," ordered Garr. "Don't stare. It's a command."

They hesitated. "Gen'ral Rakkam, he tells us stick here," one demurred.

"He wants you up above," Garr snapped. "Don't argue!"

Grisnold seconded Garr, and the party began to mount the way to the corridors above. Garr caught Grisnold's arm, holding him back.

"Wait, too, you last man," he called to the one who brought up the rear of the retiring party. "I want you to carry a message to the general."

He found a bit of paper in the pocket of his tunic, also a stub of a pencil. Quickly he wrote:

General Rakkam:

I can defeat the enemy. Retreat at once, with all who are with you. I trust you to do this—it is the only way to save everybody. I give you five minutes, then this part of the Underways will go to smash.

He signed his name. He dared write no more, lest a reading of Rakkam's mind by the Martians should warn them of his plan.

After the messenger had hurried away, Garr addressed Grisnold again.

"You and I are freaks. Martians can't read our minds, don't even know that we're here. We'll be in danger, but we can plug up all these corridors and trap them decisively. Are you game?"

"Game if you are game," said Grisnold stoutly.

"Good man! Come and help me stack this stuff—these bombs and munitions."

Grisnold helped him. Swiftly they stacked up a pyramid of cases filled with bombs and other explosives.

"Now we'll break open a cannister of these heat-pellets," Garr continued. "So—help me make a fuse train."

Carefully they arranged a line of the pellets, from the stack of bomb cases to the gap in the bars.

"Take a ray thrower," directed Garr. "I hear those big slug-beasts sniffling around out there. Give them a blast to make them run, climb through and start up the tunnel. When you hear me yell, run your fastest. Otherwise, you'll be blown into shreds. Is that clear?"

"Sure, boss."

Grisnold moved away. Garr heard the swish of his ray, the ponderous retreat of the beasts in the tunnel, and the chuckle of Grisnold as he climbed through. Then Garr drew a pistol from his waistband and discharged a pellet at the end of the impromptu fuse.

The fire leaped up and sprang from pellet to pellet, a pale flash approaching

the stacked bombs.

"Run Grisnold!" yelled Garr, and he himself sprang at the opening in the bars and dived through.

They raced toward the dark reaches of the tunnel. There was a curve, and Garr shoved Grisnold around it, holding him close to the lee side of the wall. They waited.

Then a single ear-bursting detonation, that hurled them both from their feet. A flash of white-hot light made even their angle of the tunnel as bright as noonday for a moment. On the heels of it came the terrible stir and shiver of the solid earth around them.

Rumble, rip, crash—walls were caving in, ceilings were falling—the cavern above must be collapsing into ruins. Clods bombarded Garr's and Grisnold's prostrate bodies. Then the noise and the tremor died abruptly away. Shakily they got to their feet.

"I wonder if we did that too quickly for Rakkam to draw the men back," muttered Garr. He thought of Nola. Had she escaped? If not . . .

"What we do now?" Grisnold was asking.

AS if in answer, came a commotion from ahead and above. They were near the sloping way to the levels above, the same passage down which Garr and Nola had tumbled. Grisnold, uncomprehending, produced and lighted a radium flare.

At once a Martian voice hailed them.

"Who arre you? Sstand, orr we firre."

Grisnold turned to run, and an electro-automatic spat a pellet into him. He fell, the light went out. Garr fired into the dark, then a rush and scramble of tentacled forms overwhelmed him on all sides. His weapon was wrenched away, and one of the Martians recovered and relighted Grisnold's flare.

Garr stood beside the body of his unfortunate companion, surrounded by armed Martians.

"You arre a prrissonerr," said one, an officer by his robe. "What hass happened down herre?"

"I'll tell you very gladly," snarled Garr. "I've blown up your arsenal. It's impossible to get through the wreckage above, eh? Well, it's also impossible down here! You're trapped, you're beaten, and it's I who did it!"

The official came close. "Sso that iss why the forrcess above rretrreated sso ssuddenly—"

"They retreated, then?" cried Garr. "All of them?"

"Not all. Ssome brrought up the rrearr—underr command of an Earrth woman—"

So Nola had been caught by the explosion. Garr said nothing. His sense of triumph, that had not faltered or faded in his deadly peril, now departed like a drowned candle.

"Well," he said in a voice that he tried to make steady and defiant, "when are you going to kill me? I'm responsible for everything—your discovery, the explosion, your being trapped."

"We will ssave you forr the prressent," he was told. "You may be worrth ssomething as a hosstage. Come with us."

"Where?" demanded Garr, as an armed Martian moved up on either side of him.

"To ourr lasst hope of esscape—Wesst Point."

CHAPTER XV

Return to West Point

IT was a rapid journey to the tunnel where a small door gave entrance to the head of the shot-tunnel. The Martians who gathered there numbered about thirty—all who had survived the

explosion. The officer who had captured Garr was apparently the senior commander left, for he had taken charge.

The stretch of track was crowded with vehicles, more than enough for the Martians. Yet the officer squeezed three of his followers into the first car to go, undoubtedly so that there would be some strength in the first group of arrivals at the Point. Giving it a few seconds of start, he dispatched another car, another and another, each with a single passenger. He addressed Garr:

"Get into the next carr. You and I sshall rride togetherr."

First the man took time to bind his prisoner, securely and cleverly, by pinioning his thumbs behind him. Then, at a prod from a pistol, Garr climbed into the narrow cabin. The officer squeezed in beside him. Down fell the lid, and they whisked away.

The journey was even quicker than before, and Garr lay still, his mind filled with misery. Nola had been caught in the great mass of wreckage—she had died, then, by his hand and not by any of the outlaw Martians. He, Garr Devlin, had smashed the uprising, and Nola as well.

Would it have been better, he mused for a moment, to have saved her and let Earth fall into the hands of the rebels? But he put the thought from him. Things had happened as they had happened. Mourning and wishing would never change them. Anyway, he stood very little chance of long surviving the general's daughter.

The car braked to a halt, the lid popped up, and the officer's tentacles were prodding Garr to his feet and out into the open.

The chamber which was the tunnelhead at the West Point end smote Garr's eyes with a strange effect of illusion, as though it were a place he had left long before, and often remembered. Yet he had seen it first and last a matter of seven hours before. It came home to Garr that time was indeed relative, galloping or crawling according to the events which garnished it.

The Martian officer conferred silently with subordinates. They had gathered at the trackside waiting for him. Now one of them cautiously approached a hole torn in the wall, probably by General Rakkam in his search for the chamber. He signalled with a tentacle, as though to say that all was well. The Martians, weapons ready, moved into the corridor.

As Garr was led after them through the cubicle, he saw that the leaders of the advance had surprised and captured a sentry, on duty outside. This prisoner was a lean-faced old regular, baffled but by no means daunted. He glared at the officer from between the Martians who stood guard over him.

"You looking for those petal-faced cadets who tried to sell the Point out?" he growled. "They're all under arrest, in the next corridor, for trying to pull some monkey business."

"Thank you," slurred the officer. "We will sset them frree immediately."

Half a dozen of the party moved off to do so. The captured sentry shifted his glance to Garr, and made a grimace as though he smelled something rotten.

"I see you got a Terrestrial cadet on your side. Swell material we're getting here at the Point, if it joins up with the likes of you." His eyes glittered. "Say, cadet, if you was twice the man you are, I'd still not lower myself by spitting on you."

"He iss a prrissonerr, like yourrsself," the officer informed him. "Sstand besside him, and do not talk."

THERE was commotion in the next corridor, a challenge and a cry, then the *spat-spat* of electro-automatics. The

captured sentry's mouth looked tight and pale—his companions were being cut down. After a time, the rescue party reappeared, with six of the Martian cadets. There was a welcome, silent but enthusiastic, for these reenforcements. Then again the officer addressed the sentry.

"I underrsstand that therre iss rrocket equipment on the rroof of thiss big sstrructurre."

"I ain't answering that," said the sentry defiantly.

"That meanss that therre iss. What iss the way up?"

The sentry shook his head. "Shoot me and be damned to you. I won't tell. And never worry about reading my mind—I'll just think about a little girl I knew when I was a young rookie."

The officer lifted his pistol. The prisoner laughed mockingly.

"You don't scare me worth a snort in a whirlwind. I was sworn to protect the World League against all enemies when I joined up twenty years ago. I figured then that I'd die game. Why don't you shoot?"

He closed his eyes. "Now I'm thinking what Martians really are. And everything I think goes double for you."

The pellet slapped into the man's chest, burning redly for an instant. The sentry fell forward, dead.

"You cowardly swine!" roared Garr, and sprang at the officer.

Four Martians swarmed upon him in a tangle of tentacles, subduing him.

"You've forfeited any mercy at the hands of Earth!" Garr snarled out. "Killing an unarmed prisoner—"

"We arre operrating outsside the rruless of warr," said the officer. "Dessperrate, we cannot hessitate in ourr ssearch for a ssafe rretrreat. Follow us."

Rapidly he formed his party. Eight of the group moved away first, half of them hugging one side of the corridor, half the other. Each observed the opposite doorways, so that their attentions crossed each other and were doubly effective. Behind came the chief himself, then a close-order group with rifles.

Garr Devlin followed, guarded at either elbow, and finally the remainder came, observing to the rear. Thus they moved through the corridors of sleeping-cubicles, through the dining hall, to the very door where once Garr had admiringly addressed Nola Rakkam, had been snubbed for his pains, and finished by fighting De Vigny. The first Martians moved to that threshold—

"Now!" roared a voice beyond.

Electro-automatics spoke, from the corridor beyond, in spiteful chorus. The foremost figures in the column crumpled, their companions hurriedly drawing back. The Martians fanned out into open order, taking refuge behind tables and chairs, weapons coming to the ready.

It was smoothly done, and quickly. As those who had fired from beyond the door tried to follow up their surprise with a rush, the Martians were ready for them. Garr saw that the attackers were cadets—half-dressed, nervous, but grim.

The Martians gave back the fire, knocking over the first West Pointers in the dining hall. At the same time, obeying the thought-impulses of their leader, they made an orderly withdrawal toward a side door.

Nor was it too soon. Something round and silvery, the size of a grapefruit, hurtled into the room, seeming to change direction and head for the spot where the Martians were thickest.

It was a roving bomb.* The Martian

*These explosives were powered with radio motors. When hurled or shot forth, they could be guided accurately, speed and direction being changed at will, to pursue elusive targets.—Ed.

officer at Garr's side whipped up his pistol and sent a pellet to meet the bomb. It exploded in midair near the ceiling, tearing a great hole there and shaking the walls and floor. The Martians made good their retreat through the side door, dragging Garr with them.

CADETS were boiling in pursuit, picking off members of the rear-guard. Apparently the cadet force was growing larger momentarily, for yells and directions were being shouted up and down the corridors on all sides.

There was a headlong scramble down a hallway, and the last of Earth's would-be conquerors brought up against a double door. Two of them smashed the lock with electro-automatic pellets, and they stumbled through into the library.

"You're trapped!" Garr laughed exultantly. "By now there's enough of a defense raised to surround you in here."

"We sshall ssee," purred one of his captors. "Firrsst to barrricade the doorr." It was quickly done. "Now then, we arre ssafe forr the moment."

The officer came and led Garr back toward the desk of the librarian.

"Yourr ussefulnesss ass a hosstage begins," he announced. "Look! Herre iss a televission sscrreen."

Sure enough, a glowing rectangle about eighteen inches by twelve was set in the desk-top at a slant. The Martian's tentacle fiddled with dials and power-switches.

"Hello," he said into the transmitter. "I am calling the officerr in charrge of the forrce attacking the librrarry."

"I'm in charge," responded a voice Garr knew. On the screen appeared the face of De Vigny.

The officer's tentacles pushed Garr close to the screen, and De Vigny's imaged eyes fastened upon him.

"Devlin!" cried the cadet's voice. "You're alive?"

"Yess, and a prrissonerr," replied the Martian officer for him. "You know thiss man? What he hass done? Then he iss a herro to you, a valuable comrrade. If one of you ssetss foot insside herre, thiss man you call Devlin will perrissh."

De Vigny's face drew back, and the flat countenance of Diasu showed itself.

"What's this talk?" the Eskimo demanded. "You Martians wouldn't dare. Surrender, or—"

"We arre dessperrate, we darre anything," the officer snapped back. "Look."

He pressed his pistol against Garr's temple.

"If you value yourr frriend'ss life, make terrmss."

"What terms?" asked Diasu hoarsely.

"We want a rrocket sship—therre arre ssome on the rroof—and a sshorrt head sstarrt."

"Don't listen to him, Diasu!" Garr shouted. "Smash on in and wipe out these worms. Don't worry about me."

But Diasu's swarthy features seemed to grow pale.

"It—it isn't my responsibility. I'm going to tune you in on the general's office."

There was a flicker of the image, and a new face became clear—stern General Rakkam, superintendent of West Point, looked from the screen at them.

"Yes?" came his crisp query. "What is it? You Martians are asking for a truce, eh?. You shan't have it."

"Any attempt to enterr thiss place means the death of thiss cadet," assured the officer.

"I accept that, sir," said Garr at once, and the Martian angrily cuffed him with the gun. The young man staggered, but kept his feet. He saw a hard smile come to Rakkam's face.

"You're brave, Devlin. And you're right. We can't let them bluff us with you. We'll start blasting them out of there at once."

The officer jibbered wordlessly for a moment. With sudden strength beyond the Martian average, he swung Garr around, leveling his pistol at him.

"Then—" he shrilled.

"Wait!" spoke a clear voice from the rear of the library, and this voice, too, was familiar to Garr Devlin. "Look this way!"

Nola Rakkam, smudge-faced and in torn uniform, lifted the ray thrower she carried. It gushed fire, pale and intense. The creature that had been the commander of the besieged Martians was suddenly—nothing.

"Duck, Garr!" cried Nola. And as he did so, she and the men with her turned their weapons upon the dismayed survivors of the abortive plot to seize Earth's government.

CHAPTER XVI

Morning

DAWN had come, the dawn by whose gray light New York was to have been surprised and overthrown as the first move in subduing the planet. But few on Earth knew what dread fate had come so near, to be so narrowly averted.

Radio reports from Mars told how a widespread plot, exposed at the last moment by advices from Earth's government, had been put down after brief and bloody fighting.

New York police, made discreet by emphatic orders from high places, took charge of the various Underways shops that were to have shut down, and saw that the work went ahead. A few—a very few—foremen and workmen were marched off to jail. Everything was hushed up.

And General Rakkam, at breakfast in his office on an upper level of West Point, was making certain things clear to the four cadets who were his guests.

"All others who took part in this action have been told that it was a mere raid of Martian criminals, intent on theft," he said. "We who know the truth must consider our duty to interplanetary relationships. Suppose the public of both planets should learn of this plot, shared by outlaw Martians and Terrestrials, to overthrow and usurp?"

"It would cause excitement, naturally. And controversy." That was his daughter Nola replying. Her grimy face was washed and her dark hair combed, but she still wore a smudged, tattered uniform. Thankfully she sipped at fruit juice.

"Excitement and controversy are not good food for governments," rejoined the general. "Earth and Mars had a war once, then long years of peace. This uprising has been scotched, and we hope for closer cooperation and understanding in the future, to ward off any more such happenings. The incident is being kept a secret among those who shared in it."

Garr Devlin nodded agreement, as did De Vigny and Diasu.

"I have no capacity for excitement left," said Garr. "After the explosion of the arsenal—"

"You were lucky you weren't blown into shreds," sniffed Nola. "I almost was."

General Rakkam smiled. "I congratulate myself on taking your message as virtually an order, Devlin, and pulling my forces back just in time. My daughter, being stubborn— But first I'm going to ask Diasu and De Vigny to report. They haven't had time yet.

"All I know is that, having hurried here by rocket car, I had barely landed

on the roof before they were getting me on television to say that the Martians were cornered in the library and were trying to make terms."

"We're a bit in the dark ourselves, sir," volunteered De Vigny. "We went to the Upper Town to carry your order, and an officer who took charge of matters sent us back here, telling us to go to bed and keep our mouths shut.

"But just as we had turned in, Auxiliary Cadet Rakkam came thundering at our door with a story of the enemy, right in the next corridor."

"Perhaps you'll take up the story from there," Rakkam said to Nola.

She did so. "The explosion came as I was chasing the stragglers along after the main retreat. A tunnel caved in all around me. I jumped against a wall, and so wasn't crushed, though I was completely buried. As luck would have it, I was carrying a ray thrower, and with that I bored a hole straight through all the wreckage to the Martian side. I remembered the shot-tunnel, and headed for it."

"Had we gone on ahead of you?" asked Garr.

"I saw you all going in. Giving you a little time, I entered the head chamber and found a couple of cars still there. I rode after you in one of them, and while the Martians were busy with that sentry they'd captured—poor fellow!—I managed to slip into the next corridor, run ahead and find the room of Diasu and De Vigny.

"They knew, of course, part of what was happening. We routed out the cadets, make a sketchy explanation, found weapons, and the fight started."

"But how did you get into the library to save Devlin?" asked De Vigny.

NOLA smiled. "That's a West Point secret, cadet."

Diasu and De Vigny had finished eating, and now rose and excused themselves. Garr would have followed, but Rakkam detained him with a gesture.

"I daresay you know what the answer to De Vigny's query is," said the general. "Nola got in through the hidden elevator known only to the Intelligence class."

"Cadet Devlin must have forgotten it," chimed in Nola bleakly. "I seldom have seen a more blank face than his when it turned and saw me."

"Will you two stop quarreling?" begged General Rakkam. "Since you'll probably be associated for the rest of your active lives—"

"Why, father!" interrupted Nola, her face crimsoning under its tan. "Who said—I mean, how did you—what gave you that idea?"

"Of course," went on the general serenely, "you know that your careers are assured in the Intelligence by now. I say that the world in general must not know, but certain quarters—the government, the army—will know.

"The two of you are being talked about this very day, most seriously; and you'll have to turn out more stupidly than I judge either of you to be if you make a botch of it.

"So, as I say, since you'll be associated in the same department, why not bury the hatchet?"

Garr gave Nola a tired smile.

"I'm perfectly willing," he said; and the girl slowly smiled back.

"Cadet Devlin," continued the general, "the government of the World League intends to withdraw those old charges that hang over your head. You deserve it. I only wish there were more like you in the Underways."

"But there are, sir, many such—potentially," said Garr with great earnestness. "Why must they grow up stunted and whipped? I had a chance—I'm a rare specimen, perhaps, but—"

"I know," said Rakkam. "You're anticipated in your suggestion, Devlin. I understand that a government committee is being appointed to investigate the Underways, setting up relief and rehabilitation programs. It seems that the old caves will be closed up forever, and the people moved out into the sun where they belong."

General Rakkam rose from his place, and the two young people with him.

"I'm going now, to make more reports. Will you wait for me here? I must try to smooth out the disrupted routine of the Point. I trust there won't be any more outbreaks to quell while I'm superintendent."

They saluted him, and he departed. Nola walked across the room, seeming to study the back of some military volumes on the shelf with absorbed interest.

Garr walked after her. "Nola—"

"The emergency is over," she said to him with a little smile. "First-year cadets aren't allowed to speak to auxiliaries except in line of duty."

"This is line of duty, to each other," he protested. "We agreed to stop quarreling, you know."

"I never really meant to quarrel, Garr," she said.

"Nor I. Look, I'm quite aware of what this first year will be like. I want to see and talk to you a lot, I can stand it here, if—"

"Next year's coming," she reminded him. "In the meantime, maybe we can create enough 'line-of-duty' conversation to make this year pass. The second year will be fun. And when we graduate, we'll be in Intelligence service together."

"Your father agrees that we make a good team," rejoined Garr. "I wonder if he'd be too hard to convince that we'd make—er—a better team still as a full-time arrangement."

"I wonder," said Nola Rakkam softly. . . .

GENERAL RAKKAM, returning unexpectedly for some papers he had left on his desk, was a little taken back when he saw his daughter in the arms of Garr Devlin, being kissed quite fondly and willingly.

"Harrumph!" said the general. "Young man, what is the meaning of this?"

Cadet Devlin turned quickly, a hot blush mounting to his cheeks.

"Well?" prodded the general—not too sternly.

"It—it was a problem in tactics," Garr began lamely. "The opportunity for a sudden advance was present, and I—uh—"

"Made the most of it," said Nola Rakkam, coming loyally to his side, her eyes shining.

Her father eyed the two steadily. Then he nodded to Garr.

"Carry on, Cadet Devlin!" General Rakkam ordered and, saluting gravely, strode jauntily from the room.

A SCIENTIFIC TRAGEDY

PERHAPS one of the greatest tragedies science has ever known was that of the fate of the Frenchman Lavoisier. Lavoisier, you will recall, was the genius who molded chemistry into a science. It was he who formulated what is now known as the "law of the conservation of matter." This law showed that in every chemical reaction the weight of the product was exactly equal to the weight of the substances which entered the reaction. Lavoisier also made a list of thirty-three chemical elements, explained the chemistry of fire, and infused into the body of science a new spirit for accurate and patient measurement.

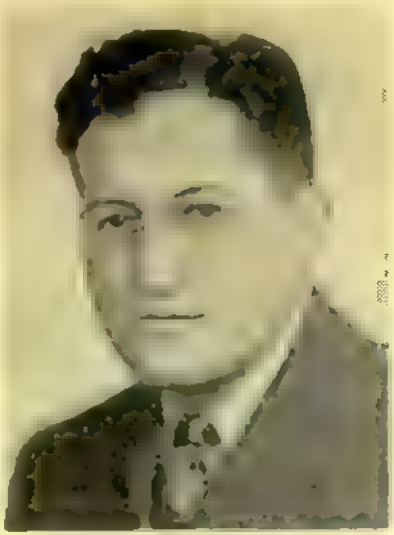
His reward: death under the guillotine during the French Reign of Terror!

Meet the Authors

DONALD BERN Author of
THREE WISE MEN FROM SPACE

I WAS born in the middle of May, 1918, after having spent some time in solitary confinement. Finally released, I lay limp and breathless, unconscious of the white-robed figures hovering about me. But then my inactivity must have caused some consternation among them, for suddenly and without warning I was whirled up, turned over, and my seat smartly spanked.

I awoke with a vengeful howl and waved my clenched fists in the air, but I was small then, and helpless. . . . So after muttering a few inarticulate threats, I subsided. After that I was content to let the days pass as they would. Nothing bothered me very much Time marched on.



DONALD BERN

Then a series of extraordinary events occurred. At three years of age I was slugged in the mouth by a little girl. At four I was almost choked to death when my coat collar caught on a wooden fence over which I was climbing However, my shrieks brought the entire neighborhood to the rescue.

At six they did me a dirty trick. They started me in school. I hated it thoroughly I refused to cooperate with the teacher and as a result occupied the dunce seat on numerous occasions. Eight horrible years followed. I was being shoved around and I didn't like it.

When I was fourteen I fell hard for a blonde. But she didn't return my affection so it was a soul-crushing, miserable affair for me.

I went to high school because everyone else did. High school didn't agree with my liver any more than grammar school, but there was nothing I could do. I stalked the marble corridors alone and wondered why Life and I got along so terribly.

At sixteen I fell in love with a brunette. At seventeen I fell in love with still another brunette. I was showing progress. Neither of them was a soul-crushing, miserable affair for me. At eighteen I went for a red-head, but she failed to appreciate my existence so it was a soul-crushing, miserable affair for me.

I completed the four-year course in four years to my utter amazement and secret delight. I went to Northwestern University to study advertising. Then I tried to get a job in that field. I failed So after two years I gave up the ghost, quit the course, and sold my books. I now knew all about national advertising, and copy-writing. But there were too many others who knew all about the same stuff

I got a job wrestling auto parts even though I knew I was no good for such work. The boss held the same view, finally, and six months later I left his employ

I started to write fiction because I had nothing else to do. I wrote a lot of short stories and began three novels I never completed the novels.

Finally I concentrated my efforts on AMAZING STORIES, and now Editor Palmer has taken some of my short yarns. "The Man Who Knew All The Answers" received a kick in the slats from most of the readers who write to the magazine, but Phil Stong has chosen it to appear in his omnibus of imaginative fiction, titled, "The Other World." Who the hell can explain this paradox?

In "Three Wise Men Of Space" I tried to put across two related ideas. First, visitors from the void don't necessarily have to have the conqueror itch. And second, even if they did have evil designs on this planet, the stuff that's going on in Europe as this is being written would scare the pants off any of the bogys and cause them to leave in a hurry.

I have several shelves weighted down with unpublished manuscripts. Some day I'll sell them to the junk man at a penny a pound. If I could sell half the stuff I write, I'd buy a harem and practically retire. *Donald Bern, Chicago, Ill.*

(Editor's Note: There's a humorous story behind Mr. Bern's association with AMAZING STORIES. *He has remained in seclusion, in spite of the efforts of the Chicago Fictioneers to get him to attend a meeting. Therefore, your editor began to be the recipient of a barrage of suspicion. Donald Bern does not exist! they muttered. You, editor, are yourself writing these stories under a pen-name. An author in an omnibus and we've never seen him! Tish!*

Well, tish yourselves, boys. Here he is!)

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

This department will be conducted each month as a source of information for our readers. Address your letters to Question and Answer Department, AMAZING STORIES, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Q. *How hot is the flame of an acetylene torch? —H. Danner, San Francisco, Calif.*

A. Although the temperature has not been definitely established, the oxy-acetylene cutting and welding torch is capable of producing a temperature of about 6000 degrees Fahrenheit, and is only exceeded by scientific means by the electric arc, which is the hottest flame man can produce.

* * *

Q. *I have heard it said that the continents are afloat, and that they are moving continually. Is this true?—Jackson Suhr, Tucson, Arizona.*

A. In 1912 Professor Alfred Wegener of Austria published a book on this hypothesis. It was his theory that the continents are drifting, but definite proof has not been made. However, certain tests, involving radio, are being carried out, and definite results may soon be made known.

* * *

Q. *What makes all the colors seen on oil?— Richard Williams, Green Bay, Wisconsin.*

A. The iridescence, which is noted on oil in a very thin film, is similar to that observed on soap bubbles, and is caused by mutual reaction of light rays on one another. The thin film acts in a prismatic manner, breaking up the rays of light into their basic wavelengths. The variations are produced by the conflict of these broken rays.

* * *

Q. *Are the red corpuscles of blood really red? I have heard to the contrary.—Edwin Blenski, Indianapolis, Indiana.*

A. Although blood is a brilliant red in color, as it flows from a wound, this color is due largely to the presence of oxygen in the blood. However, the individual corpuscles, seen under a microscope, reveal their true color as a light straw color. It is only when great numbers appear together that the intensity of the color is deepened to red.

* * *

Q. *Why does sudden bright sunshine affect the eyes so that bright specks are seen floating around, apparently in the air about one?—Ed Benkowski, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

A. These floating specks of brilliance are caused by the shock given the optic nerve when the eyes are exposed to bright sunshine or any other glaring light. They are similar to the "stars" seen when a blow on the head is received, and are a result of the same cause, nerve shock.

Q. *What is meant by the term "deliquescence"?—Arthur Wilmot, Mercer, Wisconsin.*

A. This word refers to the melting of salt, or its power to absorb water until it goes into solution. In damp weather, salt absorbs water from the air. Some types of salt have greater absorbing power than others, but all salts absorb water and have the tendency to deliquescence.

* * *

Q. *We read in countless stories of the guinea pig, how about telling us just what this little animal is, and where he comes from?—George Miller, Kansas City, Mo.*

A. The guinea pig was found by the Spaniards, when they first invaded the Andean regions of South America. It was a domesticated animal used for food by the Indians and lived in large numbers in the houses of the Indians. In the sixteenth century, Dutch traders brought the animal to Europe, and it was kept chiefly as a pet, regarded as an animal of little utility. However, it became adaptable to scientific use, for dissection, and for experimental work with serums, cancer, etc., and has proved of great use to medical science. It is readily suggested by its name, but the origin of guinea is unknown, unless it is a corruption of Guiana.

* * *

Q. *Could you give me a suitable explanation of what part cosmic rays play in our universal makeup, how they are detected, and what is their frequency?—Eugene Stoops, San Marcos, Texas.*

A. Cosmic rays are thought to be the radiations emanating from outer space, where matter is being created out of radiation. Their effect on earth is to ionize the air and other gases. They are continually converting nitrogen into hydrogen. It has also been suggested that mutations, or biological transformations in plants and animals occur in nature due to the action of cosmic rays on living tissue. Cosmic rays range in intensity from 100 million to 2 7 billion volts, and Millikan holds that in outer space elements heavier than uranium, number 92, are being created by cosmic rays. They are detected by electroscopes and have been directionally detected by the hodoscope, a device using neon lamps which flashed, according to the direction of impact. They are of a very hard and short frequency, even above x-rays. They are super-gamma rays.

Science Quiz

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you, and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine.

Count 3 points for each correct answer. If your score is between 85 and 100, you must have been smoking Albert Einstein's pipe when you answered the questions. If you score between 60 and 84, you're better than Mr. Average Man. If your total is below 50 you're probably just a bad guesser, so better luck next time.

WHAT TIME IS IT?

Have you the time on your hands to answer the following questions? If so, you should have the time of your life figuring out the correct answers to these five puzzles.

1. If you saw the moon rise one night at 8:00 P.M., you should look for it to rise the following evening about ..... P.M.

2. In 1940 you decide to hoard some radium. You'll have only half of it left by the year .....

3. If you were at the equator on March 21st and the sun were directly overhead, you wouldn't have to look at your watch to know the time was .....

4. Assuming the maximum possible duration of total eclipse, a total eclipse of the sun which began at 2:00 P.M. would be over at ..... P.M.

5. Just as the year 1941 starts, you see the Planet Neptune explode. You should know that the explosion really took place December 31, 1940 about ..... P.M.

RIGHT OR WRONG

1. There is a distance where atoms neither attract or repel each other.
2. The modern astronomer gives much more attention to the solar system than to the stellar system.
3. Nothing we can do to a diamond will make it melt or turn into vapor.
4. The masses of comets are so small that they never have been accurately measured.
5. The effect of heat on the solids is to slow down their molecules.
6. The height and temperature of the stratosphere depends only upon latitude.
7. It is impossible to say at the present time what is the composition of the central regions of nebulae.
8. The solar corona may be observed only during a total eclipse of the sun.
9. Elephants are the largest existing land animals.
10. The electric conductivity of solids has a small range.
11. A mixed substance like butter has no true melting point.
12. The planet Saturn, like Jupiter, is cloud-covered.
13. The electrical engineer uses units based either on the foot and pound or on the centimeter and the gram.
14. The height of the Kennelly-Heaviside layer usually increases at night.
15. Venus crosses the sun's disk about two times a year.

SCIENCE GOES TO WAR

For use in a scientific blitzkrieg, which of the following leading scientists would you conscript for each of the six branches of science listed below?

1. Chemistry—
   Sir Arthur Eddington, Professor E. O. Lorentz, Professor H. C. Urey, Dr. Robert A. Millikan.
2. Astronomy—
   Dr. E. P. Hubble, Max Planck, Minkowski, Dr. Lee DeForrest.
3. Physics—
   Dr. Harlow Shapley, Dr. Carl D. Anderson, Dr Adolf Meyer, Luther Burbank.
4. Biology—
   Ales Hrdlicka, Dr. H. C. Urey, Sir James Jeans, John Jacob Abel.
5. Mathematics—
   Professor P. A. M. Dirac, W. D. Coolidge, Professor Frederic Soddy, Dr. Clyde Fisher.
6. Radioactivity—
   Bertrand Russell, Thomas Hunt Morgan, Dr. Arthur H. Compton, R. H. Goddard.

SCRAMBLED SCIENCE TERMS

1. A dread tropical disease. HOLCEAR
2. An ancient ruin CAPRILOSO
3. A type of formula. PEMRICIAL
4. The longest human muscle. TASORIRUS
5. Mineral more precious than gold. LELBY-IRUM

WHICH WORD DOESN'T CONFORM?

1. Egg, stove, coke, pea, buckwheat, chestnut
2. Sturgeon, pompano, chameleon, perch, herring.
3. Wyandotte, pheasant, leghorn, black minorca.
4. Persian, manx, percheron, maltese, angora
5. Maple, tamarack, oak, mahogany, walnut.

(Answers on page 148)

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

"ONE-WORD DESCRIPTION"

Sirs:

Just a one-word description of Don Wilcox's "The Voyage That Lasted 600 Years."

SUPERFINE!

Abraham Radden,
1541 55th St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

"NEW IDEA" AND DIFFERENT

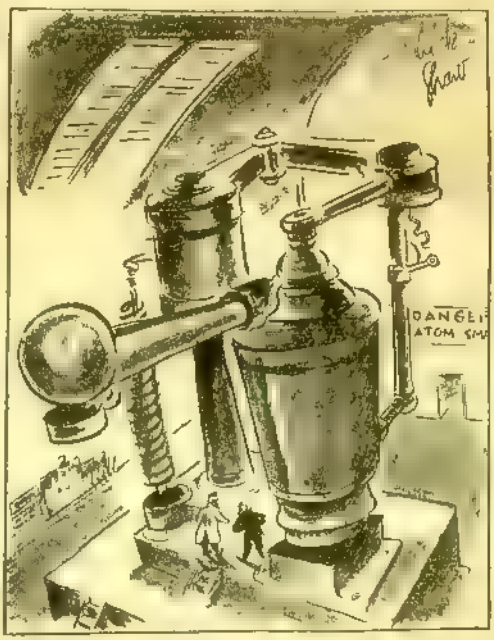
Sirs:

Amazing Stories' future looks very bright. The October number especially so with all the "new idea" and "different" type stories. A tremendous improvement over past numbers.

I understand that Burroughs soon will appear in AMAZING. That is good news! Also you plan to issue a quarterly. I hope you reprint the Skylark series, and perhaps a few by Coblentz and Campbell. Otherwise I'd like new stories in the quarterly.

I liked Paul's back cover and Morey's front one very much. More!

The best time travel story thus far printed was "Paul Revere and The Time Machine," and the best interplanetary yarn was "Black World." I do believe now that those will soon be surpassed.



"How many times must I inform you this is an atom smasher, Professor Snodgrass, not a nut cracker?"

One request. How about a long satirical novel by Coblentz? That would be a treat!

So L. Taylor Hansen is coming back? That really is something! His "Man From Space" and "The Prince of Liars" were excellent.

Please enlarge the readers section and editorial. I'm not in favor of the Quiz or Q & A.

Dan Wade,
Battery E, 13th F. A.,
Schofield, Ter. Hawaii

We can promise you that future AMAZINGS *will carry many more of those "new idea" and "different" stories you mention. In fact, we have on hand, at least ten yarns that are so super-swell that we can hardly keep from publishing them all at once in a giant issue.*

Yes, Burroughs begins a long tenure in AMAZING *next month, with his "John Carter and the Giant of Mars," a real honest-to-gosh novel about that famous man from Virginia!*

A long novel by Coblentz? What a coincidence! We have one on our desk now. Coblentz did it specially for us. And it's a wow!

As for Hansen, wait'll you read it! And the grand cover by J. Allen St. John illustrating it!

And, as you've noticed, we've enlarged the editorial, and more than three full pages of letters.—Ed.

BOND BEST

Sirs:

I think that "The Scientific Pioneer Returns" was the best in the November issue. When Mr. Bond can bring Horsesense Hank and Lancelot Biggs together so cleverly and still maintain the same amount of humor, he will continue to be my favorite. Next best was "West Point, 3000 A. D." I am looking forward to the concluding installment, also to the new contest.

I liked Paul's back cover about "Life on Titan," and I like the way Mr. Gade takes you to the very spot and gives you a first class adventure with a monster lizard.

Why the heck doesn't a certain guy down in Lake City, Fla. answer my letter?

A. A. Betts,
18 Wascana Ave.,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Maybe that "certain guy" will see this letter and it'll jog his conscience a bit! And how about letting us know how you like Paul's new series?—Ed.

LIGHTS IN THE SKY

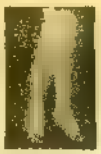
Sirs:

The November ish of AMAZING STORIES is great, but there is only one fault I have to find—not enuf letters! Especially liked Bond's masterpiece. As first when I looked at the blurb for the yarn, I thought it was a typographical errata—Biggs and Horsesense Hank in the same story!

What does Fuqua use as his cover models? A couple of movie ushers?

Hamilton's losing his grip. I think he has had a little too much Future on his mind, lately. How can a fella do all that writing and actually *sell* it?

(Continued on page 138)



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Turn to Page 67

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NOVEMBER ISSUE

RADIO NEWS

NOW ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

He must eat wire crunchies for breakfast.

I saw lights in the sky last night and thought that it was sumpin', but I was fooled. A fella was foolin' around with a search light, shining it up in the sky, and waggling it. Did I get sore!

Edward P. Sumers, SF156,
646 West Beech Street,
Long Beach, L. I., N. Y.

Fuqua doesn't use models, and your editor is quite disgruntled over your remark. We thought you'd just know *those uniforms were West Point uniforms, and not from the Savoy Theatre. But talkin' about models, artist McCauley uses 'em, and he just turned in a painting which makes us green with envy—for having such a beauteous model—but pink with pleasure because it's such a grand cover*

Lights, huh? Your editor sees 'em too. And they scare us, because they look a lot more like Mars than you think! Maybe the Martians would be an improvement over the Nazis.—Ed

ERRATA!

Sirs:

Kindly refer to col. 2, bottom, page 134, in your August, 1940, issue, and to the answer given on page 146. It seems to me that since

$$\frac{1}{2}\left\{\frac{1}{2}\left[\frac{x}{2}-\frac{1}{2}\right]-\frac{1}{2}\right\}-1=36$$

then x should be 299 instead of 295. How about it? 299 less 150 equals 149. 149 less 75 equals 74. 74 less 38 equals 36.

F. S. Wolfe,
25 Warder St.,
Dayton, Ohio

Absolutely, Mr. Wolfe! And pardon us, please. We won't spill the "eggs" again, if we can help it. If we do, transfix us!—Ed.

FORERUNNER OF GOOD SPACE STORIES

Sirs:

Congratulations on "Suicide Squadrons of Space," both to you and author O'Brien! I hope it is the forerunner of GOOD space stories like we used to have. Next on my list is "The Man Who Knew All the Answers," which was not exactly an amazing story, but was subtly humorous and had an excellent ending. (I wish all the old grouches would kick the bucket.)

Editor, I think you have a swell mag, and I hope you improve it by adding more space yarns.

Melvin Mattison,
Box 643,
Bennet, N. Mexico.

Space yarns? Wait'll you see 'em! Wilcox, with a gorgeous novel; Repp, a great new serial; Burroughs, with John Carter, Carson of Venus, etc.; O'Brien, with a yarn that'll make Suicide Squadrons look like the droolings of sheer idiocy; Ray Cummings, with his best in years; A. R. Steber; Alexander Blade; Festus Pragnell; Edmond Hamilton, with a peacherino; and last, but not least,

David V. Reed, with an ultra-ultra! Space stories indeed! —Ed

"A BOY OF THIRTEEN"

Sirs

I have been reading AMAZING STORIES for a little over a year and I believe it is "tops."

I am a boy of thirteen and consequently it is sometimes difficult for me to understand completely the various theories and explanations. However, I find that in AMAZING STORIES, what science there is is quite comprehensible.

I have been saving back covers and the stories concerning them and I now have a collection of which I am quite proud.

Some of the stories that I particularly liked: "Adam Link," "Sons of the Deluge," "History in Reverse," "Secret of the Buried City," "Hok," "Wanted: 7 Fearless Engineers," "The Missing Year," "Brutus Lloyd," "The Laboratory Sleuth."

In the stories about time travel, one author says the time is invisible but is still there, while someone else says both ship and man disappear into the future. Which is correct? Or is either of them correct?

Jules Lazar,
22 Barton Street,
Boston, Mass.

You may call yourself a boy, but you write a very adult letter, Jules.

I [illegible] myself have written several time yarns, and I used different time concepts in each. Therefore, to say which author's version of how or why is correct, would be stepping a bit beyond my powers of crystal gazing. Personally, I rather hope that in my first time trip, my ship goes along with me! —Ed

THE CREATION

Sirs:

I am not a regular reader of science fiction, but that is not because I don't like it, but because I can't always get it.

I liked the mention of the creation in "The Man Who Never Lived," and "The Synthetic Woman."

I really can't hand you any kicks after I discovered the creation in AMAZING. Thanks for two stories without the evolution dope in them.

I don't suppose that you will print this letter but I won't feel bad. I go to church on Sunday, and read science fiction week days.

Here is wishing you good luck and good stories, and thanks for the creation.

Rosco Wright,
Chittwood, Oregon.

Sorry you thought we were playing favorites and running too many stories based on evolution. Your editor has always thought that he'd have liked to have been an editor when Moses was still writing. He wrote the first "true" science fiction

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story. In fact, many authors have scanned the Bible for ideas for their stories, and we are glad that you found those stories good. Your editor himself often refers to Genesis and the creation in his editorials, with great success. There's a lot in that grand old book, and it might be well for a lot more people to supplement their week-day science fiction reading with a little Sunday reading of the Bible.—Ed.

"EXHAUSTIVE ANALYSIS"

Sirs·

The following will be an exhaustive analysis that will leave an exhausted editor, if he sees it through, but if the outcome is disaster, you have yourself to blame for issuing such a distinguished book as the October AMAZING. The only possible complaint is the illustrations.

I only hope that the masterful Morey cover will be but the first of many more.

Again that genius, Don Wilcox, takes first place with his very original 600-year voyage, with its bitterly ironic conclusion and clever characterization. This is the fourth time in five issues that I've given his effort first place, and I don't believe he has ever been out of the big three. Its Krupa illustration was the best of the issue too.

Buckner is second with "The Day Time Stopped Moving" (you use the corniest titles in the business; how about "The Eternal Second" for this one?) and is haphazardly adorned with a "love met at the soda-fountain" pic.

Third position is a contest between "Revolt On Io" and "Rescue Into The Past," with the former winning because of greater length, and the latter losing due to theoretical fallacies. I have yet to read a time-tale that logically solves the meeting of one or more "selves" in a different time stratum. The "Dan'l Boone" drawing belongs in anything but a stfmag.

Repp and Williams last, in that order

I learned after writing my last letter that D. W. O'Brien was in reality a being, and a nephew of the great and lamented editor. I proffer apologies to both parties. But nothing can make me believe that Steber isn't you-know-who, and I only wait to read something like "Black World" once more

Isn't Tucker the handsome brute? And while I'm on the subject, I want to exclaim over the clarity of the author's pictures on their page. In no other mag do photos "take" so well, and I just wait to see the phizzes of my favorites.

Discussions should be increased and your comments retained.

On my new cover poll, started last month, I awarded second place to Paul's "Life On Europa" and seventh to Fuqua's "Fifth Column of Mars", out of the nine stfcovers printed in June.

Although Paul's planet series is drifting into fantasy with "cat-women", it is still eagerly

(Continued on page 142)

CAMERA FANS! Make your own Photographic Christmas Cards!

With the holiday season "just around the corner" . . . now is the time to think about your Christmas Cards! If you want to send out unique personal greetings this year, then why not plan to make your own photographic cards? Let POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY show you exactly how to make them. Read "Say Merry Xmas with your Camera" in the

NOVEMBER ISSUE

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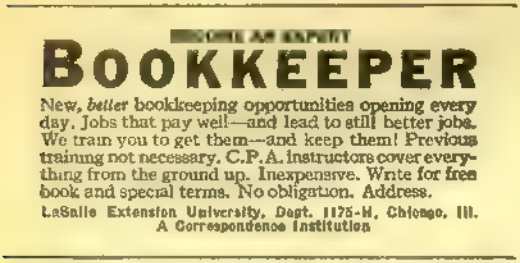
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(Continued from page 140)

awaited. This man has no rivals in his medium.

CHARLES HIDLEY, E5,
New York, N. Y.

Wait'll you see the Morey cover for February. It's the space ship scene to end all space ship scenes. Your editor intends to hang that one on his bedroom wall and let it carry him into interplanetary dreamland every night. It's almost the real thing.

Wilcox, we promise, hasn't a chance in the world of getting out of the first three, if his yarns on hand mean anything.

Corny titles, eh? Well, Bradner Buckner had the story titled "The Eternal Second," but we changed it. So maybe this title was too obvious? The same old thing. And doesn't our title exactly describe the story?

And that pic. Krupa exclaimed in horror when we suggested the lab scene. "Another lab?!" he choked. "No, a thousand times no!" So what else was there to illustrate? A woman as immovable as the rock of Gibraltar isn't so bad.

And "Dan'l Boone." Another time machine illustration? We're running out of variations.

Steber (pss-t) is none other than that old-timer, Wallace Quitman! Aha, now the secret's out!

Our photos take so well because we have a special process no other pulp has. A secret scientific process lifted from one of John Russell Fearn's Martian stories. And it works!

On our own cover poll we placed Paul first and Fuqua second. But we're prejudiced!

How about Paul's new series, beginning with this issue. We defy you to put this anywhere but first.—Ed.

COINCIDENCE?—NO

Sirs:

October cover not bad, better than August. I don't like to see evil looking creatures gloating with malevolent intent over a beautiful girl where rightfully belongs a beautiful space ship blasting its way through space.

Stories as a whole better than usual. "The Voyage That Lasted 600 Years" takes first place. Surely, Mr. Editor, you didn't use this story just "to break the monotony"? If so, you can break it a few more times with such stories!

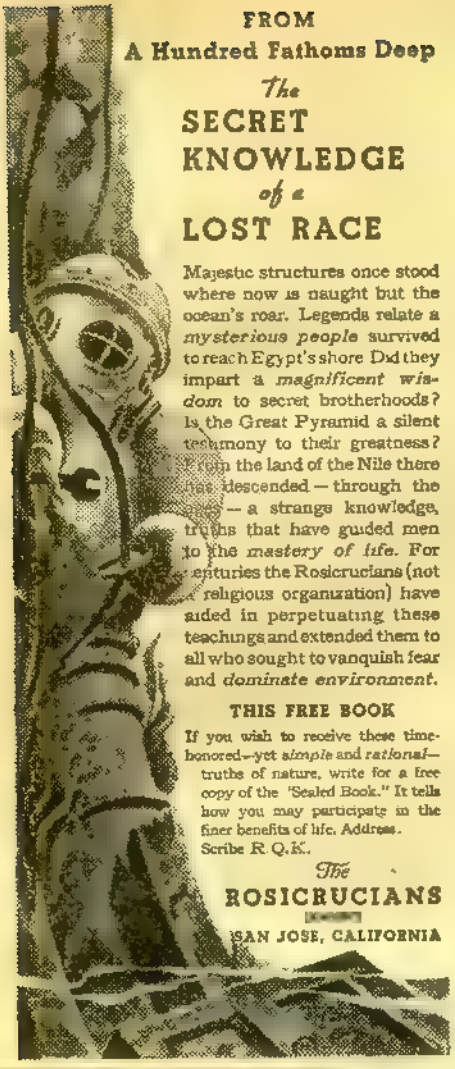
Was it a coincidence that the science quiz was changed right after friend Fred Senour's letter observing the fact that you "seem to be emphasizing physics, chemistry, and astronomy"? If not, then you must be right on the job.

Lastly, *please* don't put any writing on the back cover. You ruin a perfectly good picture suitable for framing. Also the contents page could be improved. I would like to know which stories are short and which are long before I begin to read.

RICHARD J. KUHN,
13598 Cheyenne,
Detroit, Mich.

If you'll glance at the contents page, you'll see another of those "coincidences."—Ed.

(Concluded on page 148)



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A CITY ON MARS

by HENRY GADE

Our back cover depicts Frank R. Paul's vivid painting of a Martain city, and here is the author's story of that city

None of us who read science fiction have any doubt in our minds that of all the planets, Mars most certainly supports life, or has supported life, in civilized form. We firmly believe that Mars has mothered a glorious and great civilization.

We might picture the great city of its most glorious day. Perhaps it is a magnificent metropolis which far supersedes any city known today on earth. We might picture a great seaport, with huge buildings.

But that is not the Mars of today. For Mars no longer has seas. It is a dry, arid world, where moisture is a rarity. In the spring, we note melting of the polar caps, and the resultant spread of dark areas around the so-called canals. It is this that indicates most strongly that a civilization exists, or existed, on Mars, because at certain focal points, circular areas appear which might be—cities!

Let us visit, in our imagination, one of these canal cities of Mars.

Arriving in our space ship, we descend into the atmosphere of Mars, which has recently been proved to be some 60 miles in depth. We drop toward the canals, which now become visible as wide areas of vegetation, contrastedly green against the arid ochers and reds of the balance of the planet's surface.

We hover over the canal and find to our amazement that its entire length, to the horizon before us, is lined by low structures, ranging from two to ten stories in height. They stretch on interminably into distance, arching over the oddly near horizon—near because the planet's diameter is far less than that of Earth—in perfectly straight rows.

We follow the canal, hoping to come to the city we are seeking. We note that below us, in the area of land between the buildings and the narrow canal itself, every available inch of soil is utilized to grow what we are sure must be foodstuffs.

Looking beyond the buildings, to the plains further from the canal, we see more hardy vegetation, grasses, and small shrubs. Farther yet, we see well-ordered rows of cacti. Indeed, Mars has made agriculture a science!

Down below us, in the water of the canal, we see boats, and Martians. Up here, as we open our ports to see better, it is bitterly cold. Why is it the water doesn't freeze?

We descend lower. We notice tall towers built on a strip of ground in the middle of the canal. Suddenly our lookout shouts in alarm. Startled, we look down. We have almost crashed into a transparent, glass-like tube, of great smoothness and amazing diameter. Then, as we wonder what it is, we find out.

Flashing past us with breathless speed goes a torpedo-like ship, hurtling along inside the transparent tube. Obviously the Martians have a better mode of transportation than the boats we observed before.

We descend no lower, but continue up the canal. Ahead we notice a queer golden sphere mounted in the top of one of the towers. It glows in the light of the faraway sun, but we discover that it glows too with its own light—and heat!

Now we know why it is warm down there, and why the canal doesn't freeze. These globes tap the power and light of the sun, store it up in reservoirs, to produce heat in the canal area. Protected by the ramparts of the buildings along each bank, the heated air forms a blanket that keeps out the cold of the upper atmosphere.

Down on the divided canal we see barges carrying freight. Mars depends on its canals for everything. Its whole life is built around the canals. But where are the cities?

We continue on, finally noting before us a tower that is taller than all the rest. We approach it and see that it is a sort of terminal tower, and marks the crossing of a diagonal canal. Here the transparent tube ships dart from four directions, and are despatched again after transfers of passengers. Here is one of the areas where we expected to find a city. But there is none. At last we realize the truth. Mars has no cities. Its canal systems are its cities!

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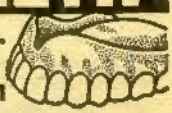

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CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Harry Syms, 31 Eden Park Ave., Beckenham, Kent, England, wants to exchange SF and view postcards . . . Fred Claassen, 978 Woodycrest Ave., Bronx, N. Y., has for sale the "Pellucidar" series by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and "The Ship of Ishtar" (mag. form) by A. Merritt . . . L. E. Connerley, Box 276, McKittrick, Calif., wishes to trade AMAZING STORIES issues and Quarterlies for "America Awake!" by Oscar Brümback . . . Ronald Kupinsky, 2707 Morris Ave., New York City, would like to have a pen pal between 12 and 14 yrs. of age . . . Morton Handler, 3537 Ainslie St., Chicago, Ill., is interested in pen pals between 12 and 14 yrs. of age who would like to start a SF club . . . Melvin Mattison, Box 643, Bennett, New Mex., would like to correspond with any "bookworm," anywhere . . . Larry Shaw, 1301 State St., Schenectady, N. Y., is desirous of correspondents of either sex, about 15 yrs. of age . . . Donald A. Dow, 617 Eggert Rd., Buffalo, N. Y., would like to hear from persons in any part of the world who are interested in forming a SF club . . . Harold LeBougeois, 2005 Gilbert St., Beaumont, Tex., would like a few feminine pen pals around 16 and 18; promises to answer every letter . . . Alfred Maxwell, 545 E. Madison St., Opelousas, La., would like fans to send him a card containing your favorite SF author, illustrator, magazine, and story; this is to arrange a ballot.

The Visible Invisible Man

(*Continued from page* 97)

closely. His pink face wreathed in a sly smile.

"Perhaps," he coughed discreetly, "you two would rather talk things over alone."

He bestowed a paternal wink on Oscar that said plainly in any language, "Go to it, you chump!"

Then with a rumbling chuckle he waddled out of the room, closing the door safely behind him.

"Oh, darling," Ann burst out, "I've been so miserable since I gave you back your ring! I know now what a terrible mistake I made. It's you I love, Oscar!"

Oscar listened, his heart filling with happiness. But with a flash of intuition, he realized that if he forgave her too quickly, he would be back in the same rut as before. Things, he decided,

were going to be different.

"Well, that's interesting," he said casually. "Glad you do."

"*Oscar,*" Ann's voice was shocked, "do you mean you don't care any more?"

"I wouldn't say that," Oscar said offhandedly.

He rubbed his fingernails vigorously on his sleeve, looked at them critically.

"I think you're a nice enough girl, Ann."

"Oh, Oscar!" Ann cried, "Something has happened to you. You've never talked to me like this before."

She looked at him, a new respect in her eyes.

"I know what I'm going to do," she said decisively. "I'm going to marry you right away! We're not going to wait another instant. Someone has got to look after you, Oscar Doolittle, and when we're married I'm not going to let you out of my sight a minute."

Oscar smiled, a lingering secretive smile. He knew then that he never need worry about becoming a hen-pecked, jealously watched husband. Not while the secret formula that made him vanish held out. Even if it didn't produce a brand-new miracle cosmetic to bolster up flabby muscles on the horsey features of nose-tilted society matrons.

Oscar smiled even more secretively, because the strange buzzing noise had started up again.

"Don't be too sure about that," he said slyly to Ann. "I mean, about your keeping a careful eye on me all the time. I might up and disappear, you know."

The buzzing grew louder in his ears.

"You'll do no such thing," Ann said stoutly. "Not while I'm around."

She looked at Oscar fondly. Oscar —wasn't there.

"Oh, good heavens!" Ann wailed. "I'm engaged to a phantom!"

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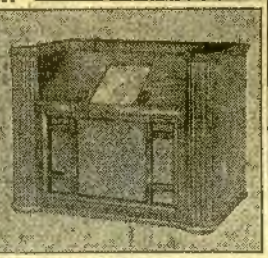

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Although I have maintained an average of about 85 in your science quiz pages, I believe that the quiz could be made better by having more common-sense questions instead of some of the more technical questions.

ARTHUR H. SCHOMP,
13 Scotland Road,
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Your editors are quite proud of the fact that our magazines present a factor that seems to be missing from present-day pulp fiction. We aim to entertain, and we try our best to get fiction that offers first, entertainment value, and next, science and imagination.

We'll see about the quiz, too.—Ed.

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 135)

What Time Is It?

1. 8:50. 2. 3540. 3. 12 noon. 4. 2:07. 5. 8.

Right or Wrong

1. True. 2. False. 3. True. 4. True. 5. False. 6. False. And also upon the season and storm conditions. 7. True. 8. True. 9. True. 10. False. For silver and sulphur (the best and poorest among elements) the ratio is something like 1000 billions of billions to 1. 11. True. 12. True. 13. False. Only on the latter. 14. True. 15. False. About two times a century.

Science Goes to War

1. Chemistry—Urey.
2. Astronomy—Dr. Hubble.
3. Physics—Anderson.
4. Biology—John Jacob Abel.
5. Mathematics—Dirac.
6. Radioactivity—Compton.

Scrambled Science Terms

1. CHOLERA.
2. ACROPOLIS.
3. EMPIRICAL
4. SARTORIUS.
5. BERYLLIUM.

Which Word Doesn't Conform?

1. Coke. Others are anthracite.
2. Chameleon. Others are fish.
3. Pheasant. Others are chickens.
4. Percheron. Others are cats.
5. Tamarack. Others are hardwoods.

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